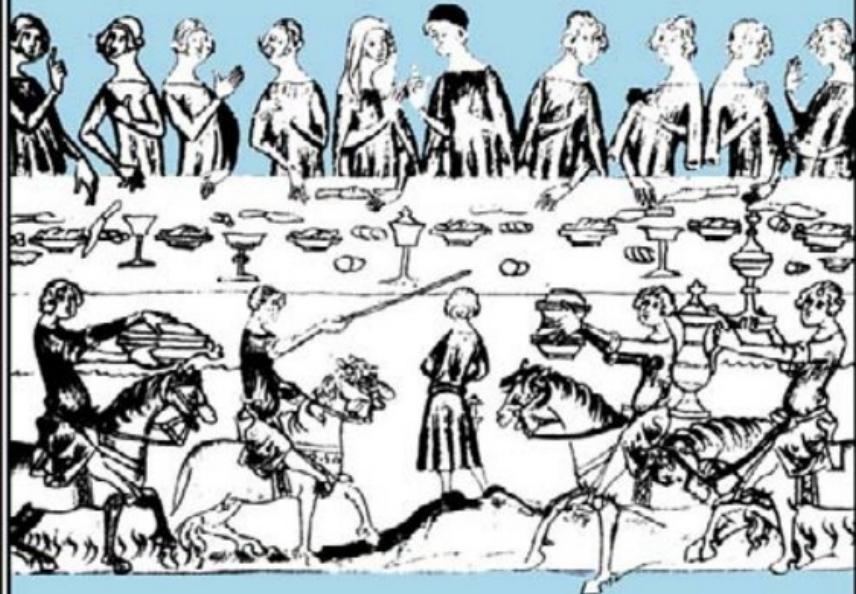


*Food and Eating
in Medieval Europe*

EDITED BY
MARTHA CARLIN
AND JOEL T. ROSENTHAL



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**The editors record with sadness the death of
Marjorie A. Brown in the autumn of 1997.
This volume is dedicated to her memory.**

Introduction

Medievalists have been slow to turn their professional eyes toward certain aspects of ‘everyday life’ that invariably engage most of us far more frequently and deeply than do the familiar academic and course-oriented concentrations that lean toward the complexities of constitutional government or the transmission of high culture. Among the noteworthy ‘events’ or focal points and institutions of ordinary life we can rank such long neglected commonplaces as food, clothing and sex (which we now talk of in terms of sexual activity and of sexuality).

In recent years students of the European middle ages have moved to correct some of this long record of professional bias and oversight, and today we can say, with perhaps a touch of pride, that there has been a significant swing of the scholarly pendulum in the direction of a serious investigation of the commonplace. That such features of life as food, clothing and sex are virtually universals, and that they are of concern to women as well as to men, and to the poor and relatively silent as well as to the rich and privileged around whom the written sources have generally clustered, are certainly among the reasons why they were once ignored. However, these are – by the dictates of our present agenda – the very reasons why such concerns and topics are now so interesting and why they are being so avidly studied.

The essays here more than satisfy these criteria. Though about half the authors are in History Departments or work as part of historical research projects, and the others are mostly in departments of language and literature, such a simple distinction by conventional disciplines is far from a reliable guide to the work and ideas they have presented. The essays that can be categorized as falling within the realms of historical inquiry and historical methods go far beyond the ‘what happened’ menu of historical inquiry. They delve into questions of nutrition, of economic geography, of gender and sex roles, and of popular culture, and their various blends and melds of the records of medieval life illuminate our current interest in re-asking old questions, in reinterpreting old answers. Whether we are concerned with how wide an economic and geographic

arc of food production had to be focused toward London to feed the teeming metropolis, as in the work of Margaret Murphy and Jim Gal loway, or how successful such food production and distribution mechanisms really turned out to be, as in Christopher Dyer's essay, or in what people actually ate when they finished work and had a chance to sit down, as Martha Carlin tells us, we can see the range of social, economic, political and cultural material that has to be introduced into the equation. Questions once asked only by geographers or economists, if asked at all for such a distant period, are now part of the working agenda of historians.

The 'literature' essays also diverge widely, and they serve to carry us from some of the hard realities of food production and consumption patterns into what we can think of as extra-nutritional aspects of this basic human endeavour. Preparing food, at virtually all levels of society and of the culinary range, was a social process, and very often it was a social process that incorporated elaborate elements of ritual, of prescribed and hierarchical public behavior, and of festival and carnival. Whether we are looking at the Anglo-Saxon hall as a locus of eating and drinking and social intercourse, as in Marjorie Brown's essay, or at the music and ritual that surrounded festive eating on ceremonial occasions in late medieval Europe, as in Susan Weiss's study, we are impressed by the persistence and ubiquity of a few basic themes about social life.

Medieval society certainly was one in which categories of skill and knowledge and mysteries of crafts and guilds were taken very seriously. A magnate's cook, who was responsible not only for producing the elaborate meals that fed the household but also for organizing and controlling the labour and fuel and raw foodstuffs needed to keep a great kitchen running, was a powerful figure in the prestigious worlds of hearth and hall. Alan Weber offers a case study of how a high position in a royal kitchen and upward mobility could go hand in glove, while Constance Hieatt alerts us to the intricacies of interpreting and classifying the thousands of surviving medieval recipes that were collected and used in great households.

From agricultural decisions about which grains to sow to the final presentation of fantastic pasties and arcane confections at the table, the steps of the food chain constitute a complex ladder of social and economic interaction. The final products – what was served at the table – can be thought of as the edible end products of a craft, of the application and embodiment of specialized knowledge designed to give pleasure, to enhance the status of their makers, and to link a basic physical need with social display and symbolic representations. The whole tale of how

food was prepared and eaten clearly extends far beyond a simple bodily process in which we must engage in order to preserve life and strength. The ritual and symbolic aspects of consumption, beside or in addition to those of sociability and hospitality, were hardly likely to pass unnoticed in a society whose basic ceremony of religious renewal and purification involved the sacrament of the Eucharist and the ingestion of the transubstantiated Host. Furthermore, days of plenty on earth were outward manifestations of divine approbation, just as those of hunger spoke of heavenly anger and a loss of grace; Julia Marvin's essay relates biblical and medieval readings about dearth and starvation to the permissible ranges of human response.

Not all of the symbolism that surrounded cooking and eating was spiritual, and a good many of the messages about the arrangements of this world – as well as that to which men and women hoped eventually to come – were bound up with the hierarchy of the table. ffiona Swabey shows how a great lady's table, and the elaborate apparatus on which it rested, can be read as a text on household management, on the social role open to a powerful widow, and on complex rhythms of regional and provincial culture. Sitting at table and feeding others are readily seen as an endless cycle of social interaction wherein practical matters merged, with few visible seams, into the world of ceremony and status. Upper-class life and courtly life were partly defined and set apart by their framing of social eating.

At the same time we should remember that what we can identify and elaborate for the topmost layers of society regarding the links between eating and the social structure was also true, with appropriate variations for class and culture, for every man and woman who drew a knife to cut bread and who shared salt or ale with another. Everyone came to realize, at some early point in life, that dietary distinctions marked social class just as such distinctions were also part of the regular variations that marked the cycles of the seasons and of the ecclesiastical calendar. From a morbid or hypnotic fascination with dearth and famine, at one extreme, to the theatricality of the music- and poetry-decked wedding feast or political banquet at the other, we have a broad spectrum of behaviour wherein the table, with both its food and its festivities, remained the fixed star of the firmament.

In a world that relied on humoural theory to explain both the unity of the cosmos and the nature of individual temperaments and health, 'you are what you eat' was a good deal more than a cliché. The essay by Elizabeth Biebel reminds us of the moral significance that was logically attached to kinds of food eaten (or rejected) as well as to occasions for

eating (or fasting). Personality, gender distinctions and the line between purity and impurity could be traced, to some extent, by a study of consumption patterns and predilections. How one sought to blend personal style and choice into the larger rhythms of the world might be revealed, both in terms of health and of moral disposition, by an examination of one's shopping list and collection of pots and pans.

Martha Carlin

Joel T. Rosenthal

Abbreviations

BL	British Library, London
EETS	Early English Text Society
OED	Oxford English Dictionary
PRO	Public Record Office, London

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The Feast Hall in Anglo-Saxon Society

Marjorie A. Brown

The Anglo-Saxon feast hall was at the heart of early English society. Here people met to celebrate their victories, to proclaim social bonds with one another and to share the products of the land. Feast-hall scenes frequently appear in Old English literature, notably in heroic poems such as *Beowulf*, in which much of the action occurs within a magnificent royal hall. In poetry adapted from Christian rather than Germanic legendary sources, the protagonists may also meet within the mead halls, but the tone of these meetings tends to be darker, even demonic. The shifting literary representation of the feast hall invites an examination of its multiple roles in the Anglo-Saxon world.

Some physical remains of feast halls have been found in England. Archeological excavations at Yeavering have uncovered the traces of a royal hall eighty feet long and forty feet wide, with plank walls set eight feet into the ground to support a high roof.¹ At Cheddar, a hall seventy-five feet in length held gatherings in the ninth century.² While the excavations made at the Sutton Hoo site over the last half-century have disclosed a ship rather than a hall, archeologists have found kingly furnishings, including silver-gilt mounts for drinking cups and horns and a harp that could have been played at feasts. As important as the material evidence may be, however, the descriptions of feast halls found in Anglo-Saxon language and literature present a fuller picture of the hall's importance.

The Old English language has an extensive vocabulary of terms to denote the feast hall and its furnishings. Terms for the feast hall's servants, provisions, and even its décor are formed from the root words *ærne*, *reced* and *heall*. The word *sele*, meaning 'hall' or 'house', is the basis for several compound words. Some of these compounds describe the people of the hall, such as the *selesecg* or the *seleðegn*, the 'hall-retainer'.³ The noun *sele-*

¹ James Campbell, ed., *The Anglo-Saxons* (Oxford, 1982), p. 57.

² Ann Hagen, *A Handbook of Anglo-Saxon Food: Processing and Consumption* (Pinner, Middlesex, 1992; reprinted 1993), p. 79.

³ *The Wanderer*, line 34; *Beowulf*, line 1794.

dream, ‘hall-joy,’ and the adjective *seledreorig*, ‘sad at the loss of a hall’, demonstrate the emotions that communal feasting might evoke in poetic reminiscence. The wanderer, in the poem of the same name in the Exeter Book, remembers his happiness in terms of the hall and its generous lord:

Hwær cwom mearg? Hwær cwom mago? Hwær cwom maþþumgyfa?
Hwær cwom symbla gesetu? Hwær sindon seledreamas?
Eala beorht bune! Eala byrnwiga!
Eala beodnes þrym! (lines 92–95a)

(Where has gone the steed? Where has gone the man? Where has gone the
giver of treasure? Where has gone the place of the banquets? Where are the
pleasures of the hall? Alas, the gleaming chalice; alas, the armoured warrior;
alas, the majesty of the prince!)

In a similar elegiac tone, the poet of 'The Ruin' characterizes the vanished joys of the city: 'Many a mead-hall was full of delights / until fate the mighty altered it'.⁴ A well-known episode recounted in Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica* also depicts the pleasures of the hall in comparison to the harsh world beyond its doors. A priest illustrates the transitory nature of human existence by comparing life to a sparrow that, for a moment, flies into a warm, well-lit hall, where the king sits dining with his thegns, and then vanishes again into the winter storm raging outside.⁵

The words denoting the lord and the lady of the hall derive from the duty of feeding their people. The Old English lord was a *hlaford*, a title deriving from the compound *hlaf-weard*, or 'bread-guardian'. We use a related term today when we speak of the supporter of a family as the 'breadwinner'. Similarly, the lady was a *hlafdige*, or 'bread-maker'. An old English word for 'dependant', *hlafæta*, literally means 'bread-eater'. Servants' wages and land-rents might be paid in so many loaves of bread, a standard Anglo-Saxon unit of food. Bread was an important constituent of a feast, along with meat, fish and game.⁶ The bread-eaters at the

⁴ meodoheall monig mondreama full
oppæt þæt onwende wyrd seo swipe.
(lines 23-24)

¹⁴The Ruin': George Philip Krapp and Elliott Van Kirk Dobbie, eds, *The Exeter Book* (New York and London, 1936), p. 228. Kevin Crossley-Holland, trans., *The Anglo-Saxon World: An Anthology* (Oxford and New York, 1982), p. 60.

⁵ Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica*, ii. c. 13.

⁶ Hagen, *Handbook of Anglo-Saxon Food*, p. 83. She notes in a section on 'bread', pp. 11–13, that loaves of bread might be sized: Edward the Elder left two hundred large and one hundred small loaves in his will. 'Bread dough' is one possible answer to riddle 45 in the Exeter Book.

feast were the lord and lady's kin, their young warriors and seasoned fighters, and their counsellors.

The names of intoxicating beverages also identify the hall in such compound terms as *beorsele*, 'beer-hall', *ealusele*, 'ale-hall', and *winsele*, 'wine-hall'.⁷ Drinking was a major part of the festivities in the feast hall, where the *selegyst* or 'hall-guest' might sit on the *medubenc*, 'mead-bench', or *beorsett*, 'beer-seat'. Providing drink to the hall-guests was the mark of a king and the duty of a queen. A set of gnomic verses from the Exeter Book describes the queen's hospitable responsibilities, which begin with the king: 'she must always and everywhere greet first the chief of those princes and instantly offer the chalice to her lord's hand'.⁸ The noble lady of the hall appears in a more symbolic fashion in the elegy called 'The Husband's Message'. The husband sends word to the woman 'who swore oaths together' with him when they shared the mead-halls saying that he will lack for nothing, 'neither horses nor riches nor joy in the mead-hall', if she will join him. Presumably she will bring the hall-joy with her.⁹ Through shared eating and drinking the hall brings together society, with the king and the queen at its heart to generate pleasure with their gifts.

⁷ *Beor* was not the hopped beverage drunk today, as hops were not used in England until the fifteenth century. Instead, *beor* probably was a type of fermented fruit drink (Hagen, *Handbook of Anglo-Saxon Food*, p. 83).

⁸ 'Maxims I': Krapp and Dobbie, eds, *Exeter Book*, p. 159:

for gesiðmægen	symle æghwær
eorðor æðelinga	ærest gegretan,
forman fulle	to frean hond
ricene geræcan	(lines 88–91a)

Translation by S.A.J. Bradley, ed. and trans., *Anglo-Saxon Poetry* (London and Rutland, Vermont, 1982; reprinted 1987), p. 348. For commentary on the potential power a royal woman might wield through her formal presentation of drink, see Michael J. Enright's 'Lady With a Mead-Cup: Ritual, Group Cohesion and Hierarchy in the Germanic Warband', *Fruhmittelalterliche Studien*, 22 (1988), pp. 170–203.

⁹

ne meara ne maðma	nis him wilna gad
ænges ofer eorþan	ne meododreama,
þeodnes dohtor	eorlgestreona
ofer eald gebeot	gif he þin beneah incer twega.

(lines 44b–48)

(He will lack nothing,

neither horses nor riches nor joy in the mead-hall

nor any of the noble treasures on earth,

O daughter of the prince, if he possesses you.)

'The Husband's Message', in Krapp and Dobbie, eds, *Exeter Book*, p. 227; Crossley-Holland, *Anglo-Saxon World*, p. 58.

The best-known literary example of the Anglo-Saxon feast hall is the hall named Heorot, or ‘hart’, built by the order of King Hrothgar in the opening verses of *Beowulf*. ‘It came into his mind’, the *Beowulf* poet says, ‘that he would command men to construct a hall, a mead-hall larger than the children of men had ever heard of, and therein he would give to young and old such as God gave him’ (lines 67–73).¹⁰ The hall rises rapidly, ‘high and horn-gabled’ (line 82a).¹¹ Within the decorated walls, Hrothgar and his queen, Wealhtheow, preside over banquets, present lavish gifts to their retainers and pour out mead for their warriors and wise men.

The people in the feast hall also serve as an audience for the music and poetry of the *scop*, literally the ‘shaper’, who, like the *Beowulf* poet, presents tales of famous heroes and their deeds. The *scop*’s stories are powerful enough to compel his audience to action. For instance, when the outcast Grendel hears the sound of the *scop* singing the Creation story in the hall, the monster’s hatred for the people of Heorot begins. Since the *scop* commences his song shortly after the *Beowulf* poet has described the making of Heorot, the two creation episodes connect the earthly hall with the garden of Eden, and the *scop*’s ability with the Creator’s. Therefore the hall may be a manifestation of paradise on earth, a Christian concept supported by Alvin Lee, who says ‘the newly created hall is in paradisal harmony with heaven’.¹² In this paradigm, Grendel, too, shares in the Creation story, because the poet identifies him as a descendant of Cain who is doomed to walk the earth under God’s curse. Grendel is the transgressor exiled by God from paradise, which explains his rage upon hearing the *scop*’s description of its beauties.

The *scop*’s use of the Genesis material recalls how the first recorded Anglo-Saxon poet made his reputation by turning the Creation story into Old English verse. He was Cædmon, who, as Bede writes, was shamed

10

þæt healreced	Him on mod bearн
medoærn micel	hatan wolde
þon[n]e yldo bearн	men gewyrcean
ond þær on innan	æfre gefrunon,
geongum ond ealdum,	eall gedælan
	swylc him God seald
	(lines 67b–72)

All Old English passages of *Beowulf* are from *Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburgh*, 3rd edn, ed. F. Klaeber (Lexington, Massachusetts, 1950); trans. Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, p. 413.

¹¹ ‘Heah ond horngeap’ (Klaeber, *Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburgh*, line 82a).

¹² Alvin A. Lee, *The Guest-Hall of Eden: Four Essays on the Design of Old English Poetry* (New Haven, Connecticut and London, 1972), p. 181.

by his inability to compose songs at the feast table. Instead Cædmon withdrew to his home whenever the harp was passed to him in the hall. One night, however, a heavenly messenger appeared to Cædmon while he was tending animals in the stable and commanded that Cædmon sing about 'the Creation of all things'. From that time forward Cædmon turned scripture into religious verses in Old English.¹³

Although the *Beowulf* poet compares Heorot to a Christian paradise, in other ways the hall seems more Germanic than Christian. An important activity in the hall is the sealing of bonds between royalty and their followers, the German war-band or *comitatus*, through the giving of drink, gifts and pledges. When Wealhtheow first meets Beowulf, the hero who has come to rid her husband's hall of the monster Grendel, she pours mead into his cup and bids him welcome in a formal speech. He also replies formally, promising her that 'I shall achieve a deed of manly courage or else have lived to see in this mead-hall my ending day'.

eorlic ellen on þisse meoduhealle	Ic gefremman sceal oþðe endedæg minne gebidan.
--------------------------------------	--

(lines 636a–38)

Well-pleased, the queen seats herself next to the king. Beowulf's boasting, excessive as it might seem to contemporary readers, is typical of the feast hall and represents the warrior's pledge to his lord or lady. After Beowulf himself becomes a king, one of his men reminds the others that they owe loyalty to him by recalling 'that time we drank mead, when we promised our lord in the beer-hall' to support him.¹⁴ The warrior Ælfwine uses a similar formula when, in the heat of the battle of Mal-

¹³ Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica*, iv, c. 24.

¹⁴ Ic ðæt mæl geman,
þonne we geheton
in biorsele
þæt we him ða guðgetawa
gif him þyslicu
helmas ond heard sword.
þær we medu þegun,
ussum hlaforde
þe us þas beagas geaf;
gyldan woldon,
þearf gelumpe,
(lines 2633–38a)

('I remember that time we drank mead, when we promised our lord in the beer-hall – him who gave us these rings – that we would repay him for the war-arms if a need like this befell him – the helmets and the hard swords.' Trans. E. Talbot Donaldson, *Beowulf*, ed. Joseph F. Tuso (New York and London, 1975), p. 46.

don, he asks his comrades to remember the pledges they uttered to their lord over their mead.¹⁵

Sharing mead with the *comitatus* in the hall is not the only way in which the ruler secures loyalty. As the wanderer indicates, a good king distributes rich gifts in his hall. The greatest triumphs in *Beowulf* are marked by the spectacular, public and lavish presentation of gifts from the king's throne in the feast hall, known as a 'gift-seat', *gifstol*. In return for killing Grendel, Beowulf receives a golden standard, a helmet, a mail-shirt and eight horses with golden bridles and jewelled saddles. The horses are led into the feast hall by order of the king so that all may see the hero's rewards. Queen Wealhtheow also offers Beowulf precious gifts, including a rich necklace and a mail-shirt. In return Beowulf gives many of these treasures to his own king when the hero returns home. The king then bestows upon Beowulf an heirloom sword, land and a hall of his own. Once again, these exchanges take place in the feast hall. Thus the hall is the site of the redistribution of wealth within the community as well as the locus of societal bonds.

Despite the rich gifts, the alcoholic pledging done by the hall's inhabitants may have a negative impact on their relationships. A feast is sometimes referred to as *gebeorscipe*, 'beer-drinking', and drunken men may be violent. The *Beowulf* poet announces that one of Beowulf's chief virtues is that he never slays any of his companions while drunk on the mead benches. In contrast, the poet describes a bad king, Heremod, who 'killed his table-companions' (line 1713).¹⁶ A poem called 'The Fortunes of Men' also describes an 'irascible ale-swiller', *irrum ealowosan* (line 49), who slays a companion on the mead bench with his sword, and a man 'crazed by mead', *meodugal*, who commits suicide (line 52).¹⁷

¹⁵ OE passage from 'The Battle of Maldon', in *Old English Handbook*, ed. Marjorie Anderson and Blanche Colton Williams (New York, 1935; reprinted Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1963).

Ælfwine þa cwæð, 'Gemunað þa mæla, þonne we on bence hæleð on healle, nu mæg cunnian	he on ellen spræc: þe we oft æt meodo spræcon, beot ahofon, ymbe heard gewinn; hwa cene sy.'
--	--

(lines 211–15)

(Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, p. 525: 'Ælfwine, then, spoke out and valiantly declared: "Let us call to mind those declarations we often uttered over mead, when from our seat we heroes in hall would put up pledges about tough fighting; now it can be proved who is brave."')

¹⁶ 'Breat bolgenmod beodgeneatas' (line 1713).

¹⁷ Krapp and Dobbie, eds, *Exeter Book*, p. 155.

Drunkenness may contribute to violent tendencies already present in the hall-guests. Images of the hall reddened with blood and strewn with bodies appear in many Old English poems as evidence of the furious feuds that could tear apart royal families and their kingdoms. The poetic fragment known as the ‘Fight at Finnsburgh’ tells of a blood-feud that erupts into a five-day battle, with one side valiantly defending the doors to a hall. Although both groups are related by marriage, the enraged warriors fail to keep the peace in their shared hall because they cannot forget their old enmities.¹⁸

Beowulf predicts that Heorot will eventually fall in flames, wracked by the same sort of blood-feud that destroyed the hall at Finnsburgh. The most immediate threat to the hall, however, comes from Grendel’s nightly attack on the sleeping warriors of the hall, whom he devours in a ghoulish parody of the feasts held by the king. Describing the horror, Hrothgar tells Beowulf that for years Hrothgar’s warriors had boasted over beer how they would defeat Grendel, yet ‘in the morning this mead-hall was a hall shining with blood’, ‘Ponne wæs þeos medohal on morgen-tid / drihtsele dreorfah’ (lines 484–85a). The shining blood contrasts grimly with the gleaming decorations of the hall. Grendel’s attacks invert the pleasures of the hall in other ways as well. When Beowulf wrestles with the monster, the struggle is vividly shown in feast-related images: the gold-adorned mead benches go flying and, rather than the song of the *scop*, the building resounds with Grendel’s wailing, which the poet calls ‘terrible drink for the Danes’ (literally *ealuscerwen*, ‘ale-sharing’, line 769).

The *Beowulf* poet also contrasts the dwellings of the monsters with the feast halls of men. Grendel and his mother live in a cold, dark, deathly mere on the edge of civilisation. At the bottom of the mere Beowulf finds Grendel’s mother in a *niðsele* or ‘hostile hall’ (line 1513). During the struggle, she sits on Beowulf, whom the poet ironically terms a *selegyst*, ‘hall-guest’ (line 1545). The ‘guest’ rewards his ‘hostess’ by slaying her. The Grendel family keeps an ancient sword, carved with runes, hanging on the walls of their lair, like the treasures kept in the halls of men. Beowulf uses the sword to kill Grendel’s mother and to cut off Grendel’s head, thus turning the hall-treasure against its owner.

In the second section of the poem, Beowulf, now a venerable king, fights a dragon that attacks his kingdom after a golden cup is stolen from its hoard. The dragon’s dwelling is described poetically as an *eordsele* or earth-hall (line 2410), a *hringsele* or ring-hall (line 3128), and a

¹⁸ See Klaeber, *Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburgh*, pp. 245–53, for OE text and notes.

dryhtsele dyrnne, a ‘secret hall’ (line 2320). At the end of their fight, both opponents are dead. The dragon’s body is pushed over the cliff into the sea, while Beowulf’s corpse burns on a funeral pyre. The mourners build Beowulf a tomb on the cliff, burying the dragon’s treasure with the king’s remains. In contrast to the treasures that Beowulf had received earlier, no one will profit from the dragon’s hoard, which has a curse set upon it.

The construction of Beowulf’s barrow, surrounded by a splendid wall devised by skilled workers, echoes the building of Heorot at the beginning of the poem. However, Beowulf’s tomb exists to remind the people of his fame on earth, rather than to point to heaven. Beowulf’s people, left without the protection of their *hlaford*, predict that their foes will soon attack and disperse the kingdom, ending the hall-joys of the hero’s people. This ending seems more Germanic than Christian, more reminiscent of Ragnarok than the Day of Judgement with its hope for the future.

The halls portrayed in *Beowulf* generally follow an Anglo-Saxon paradigm derived from Germanic myths of heroic warriors, enchanted swords and monstrous opponents. A different representation of the feast hall appears in the poem *Judith*, which is bound together with *Beowulf* in MS Cotton Vitellius A XV. *Judith* is derived from the Old Testament book of the same name, which recounts the tale of a brave and pious Jewish widow who saves her city from a besieging Assyrian army. In the biblical version, Judith dons the festive clothing of a married woman, adorns herself with all her jewellery, and goes into the enemy camp, taking along a bag of kosher food so that she may keep the Jewish dietary laws. Her great beauty captivates the Assyrian general, Holofernes, at a banquet. He is so stupefied, in fact, that she is able to decapitate him with his own sword and to take the head back to her city, using the bag to smuggle the grisly trophy out of the camp. The demoralized Assyrians flee from Israel, and Judith enjoys an honoured old age as the saviour of her people.

The Old English poetic form of Judith’s story begins abruptly, because some of the manuscript is missing – how much is not certain. As the poem commences, Holofernes invites his senior commanders to attend a banquet with spendidly prepared dishes and bowls brimming with intoxicating liquor. Judith, who has been in the Assyrian camp for several days, does not attend, but remains in a separate ‘guest-hall’, *gysterne* (line 40). Her absence marks a significant change from the biblical version, in which she dresses in her most seductive clothing, sprawls on a pile of fur rugs and lies to the dazzled Holofernes about his chances of success with her and with her besieged city.

The presence of noblewomen was certainly a feature of the Anglo-Saxon hall, as shown by Queen Wealhtheow's appearance in *Beowulf*. Why, then, exclude Judith from the feast? An answer may appear in the poet's description of the banquet. He characterizes the gathering as 'insolent men' who are the general's 'confederates in evil'. They drink excessively, unaware that they are 'doomed'. Holofernes also behaves badly at the celebration:

Hloh 7 hlydde,	hlynede 7 dynede,
þæt mihten fira bearн	feorran gehyran,
hu se stiðmoda	styrmde 7 gylede,
modig 7 medugal	manode geneahhe
bencsittende,	þæt hi gebærdon wel.
Swa se inwidda	ofer ealne dæg
dryhtguman sine	drencte mid wine,
swiðmod sinceſ brytta	oð þæt hie on swiman lagon,
oferdrencte his dugude ealle	swylce hie wæron deaðe geslegene

(lines 23–31)¹⁹

He laughed and bawled and roared and made a racket so that the children of men could hear from far away how the stern-minded man bellowed and yelled, insolent and crazed with mead, and frequently exhorted the guests on the benches to enjoy themselves well. So the whole day long the villain, the stern-minded dispenser of treasure, plied his retainers with wine until they lay unconscious, the whole of his retinue drunk as though they had been struck dead.²⁰

At the end of the banquet, Holofernes commands that Judith, whom the poet calls a 'noble virgin' rather than a widow, should be brought to his tent for his use.²¹ By the time she arrives, Holofernes is, like his men, dead drunk and shortly thereafter dies when Judith, calling upon the Trinity for aid, decapitates him. The description of the feast shows Holofernes and his men to be debauched and lecherous drunkards headed for doom, whereas Judith, by staying apart from their uproarious banquet, remains virginal and undefiled.

The soul of Holofernes sinks under the ground on its way to hell, to be eternally wrapped in snakes and fiery torment. In another Old English

¹⁹ All Old English quotations from *Judith* are taken from *Judith*, ed. B.J. Timmer (London, 1952; revised and reprinted, Exeter, 1978).

²⁰ Trans. Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, p. 497.

²¹ Trans. Bradley, ibid., p. 497, from *torhtan mægð* (line 43).

poem based on the *passio* of St Juliana, the villains suffer a similar fate. Juliana wins sainthood for her refusal to sacrifice to pagan idols and to wed a pagan nobleman, Eleusius. The poet Cynewulf adds a new twist to the fate of Eleusius and his men. Rather than simply drowning, as in the Latin version, they go to hell, which Cynewulf compares to a feast hall:

Ne þorftan þa þegnas
seo geneatscolu
to þam frumgare
witedra wenan,
ofer beorsetle
æpplede gold.

in þam þystran ham
in þam neolan scræfe
feohgestealde
þæt hy in winsele
beagas þegen,

(lines 683–88a)²²

(The thanes in that dark dwelling, the flock of retainers in that deep pit, had no reason to look expectantly to the overlord for the appointed treasures, or that they would receive upon the beer-bench rings and embossed gold in the wine-hall.)

Cynewulf also credits the violence that often erupts in feast halls to demonic influence when a devil confesses to Juliana that he has often encouraged men drunk with beer to renew old grievances. The devil boasts that 'I have served them strife out of the wine goblet'.²³

These examples of hellish feast halls and the demons who populate them may be a logical development of the 'hostile halls' that Grendel and his mother occupy. In heroic poems such as *Beowulf*, however, evil halls are balanced against the 'good' halls and the communal rituals that take place in them. One reason for the demonization of the hall in *Judith* and *Juliana* may be that the Christian virtues of the time included sobriety, fasting and chastity, all of which were codified in rules for churchmen and laymen. The Old English poem *Christ and Satan* describes how Christ set an example of restraint for good Christians by fasting for forty days in the wilderness, even though the devil tempted him to show his power by turning stones into bread.²⁴ Christ's fast set the pattern for the forty-day Lenten fast, just as the Last Supper was the model for Christian feasts.

²² All Old English quotations from *Juliana* are taken from *Cynewulf's Juliana*, ed. Rosemary Woolf (London, 1955; revised and reprinted, Exeter, 1977). Trans. Bradley, *ibid.*, p. 318.

²³ 'Ic him byrlade / wroht of wege' (lines 486b–87a). Trans. Bradley, *ibid.*, p. 314.

²⁴ 'Christ and Satan', in *The Junius Manuscript*, ed. George Philip Krapp (New York and London, 1931), lines 667–74.

By feeding his disciples on bread and wine representing his body, Christ supplanted the role of the *hlaford* as bread-provider and shifted the setting of the feast from specific earthly locations to more spiritual sites, either the church, the world *in toto*, or heaven. Fittingly, the first Advent lyric of *Christ I* celebrates Christ as the ‘cornerstone’ of the ‘great hall’, locking it together in his strong arms. The hall is the world that needs the care of Christ, the master architect, to remain together.²⁵ In the conclusion of *The Dream of the Rood*, the dreamer has a vision of heaven ‘where the people of God are seated at the feast in eternal bliss’.²⁶

In contrast to the heavenly feast, the eight mortal Anglo-Saxon sins, including pride, gluttony and anger, might all appear at the worldly dining table.²⁷ In the Old English poem *Daniel*, for example, the people of Israel lose their power because ‘at their feasting, pride and drunken thoughts invaded them with devilish deeds’.²⁸ Alcuin of York, writing to Ethelred, king of Northumbria, after the Vikings had raided the monastery at Lindisfarne, accuses the English of bringing God’s punishment upon themselves through their callous behaviour. ‘Some labour under an enormity of clothes, others perish with cold; some are inundated with delicacies and feasting like Dives clothed in purple, and Lazarus dies of hunger at the gate. Where is brotherly love? . . . Let your use of clothes and food be moderate.’²⁹ Because humanity’s first sin was the act of eating the fruit of the forbidden tree, gluttony could, understandably, lead to all other sins.

The servants of Christ in the Anglo-Saxon monastic dining hall did not lack for food, but the amount and type were strictly controlled, and

²⁵ Trans. Crossley-Holland, *The Anglo-Saxon World*, p. 197.

You are the corner-stone the builders
once discarded. It becomes you well
to stand as the head of the great hall,
to lock together the lengthy walls,
the unbreakable flint, in your firm embrace.

²⁶

geseted to symle,	þær is dryhtnes folc
	þær is singal blis

(lines 140b–41)

Trans. Crossley-Holland, *ibid.*, p. 204.

²⁷ Homily 20 of the Vercelli Book lists the eight capital sins: *ofermodignes*, ‘pride’, *giferne*, ‘gluttony’, *forlyger*, ‘fornication’, *gitsung*, ‘avarice’, *yrre*, ‘anger’, *sleacnes*, ‘sloth’, *unrotnes*, ‘melancholy’, and *idel wuldor*, ‘vainglory’.

²⁸

. . . hie wlenco anwod	æt winpege
deofoldædum,	druncne gedøhtas.

(lines 17–18)

‘Daniel’, in *Junius Manuscript*, ed. Krapp; trans. Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, p. 68.

²⁹ Trans. Crossley-Holland, *Anglo-Saxon World*, pp. 187–88.

a devout monk might never eat meat or drink wine.³⁰ Monastic eating habits are described in Ælfric's *Colloquy*, in which a young novice says that he still eats meat 'for I am a child living under the rod'. He eats with moderation 'as befits a monk . . . for I am no glutton', and drinks only water or ale.³¹ The accounts of saintly Englishmen and women often stress their abstemious behaviour. Wilfrid of Ripon never drank a full glass at the dining table, even when alone; Æþelðryð restricted herself to one meal per day; and Cuthbert, in his last days, nourished himself by nibbling an onion. Bede says that Cuthbert 'was ready to suffer hunger and thirst in this life in order to enjoy the banquets of the next'.³²

English legal codes specified fast days and the penalties for breaking them, marking the acceptance of fasting for the laity as well as monastics. Among the laws of Wihtred, a late seventh-century king of Kent, are these: 'If anyone gives meat to his household in time of fasting, he is to redeem both freeman and slave with *healsfang* [one-tenth of one's wergild]. If a slave eat it of his own accord [he is to pay] six shillings or be flogged'.³³ To do penance for their sins, lay persons might fast on water, green herbs and coarse bread or restrict themselves to one meal a day and offer the rest to the poor. The wealthy might pay others to fast for them.³⁴

Temperance seemed to be particularly important for women, who might lose their chastity otherwise. Ambrose, commenting on the story of Judith, credits her sobriety for her escape from the Assyrians, 'for if she had drunk she would have slept with an adulterer' ('nam si Judith bibisset, dormisset cum adultero'). By her moderation, he adds, 'the fasting of one woman defeated an innumerable army of drunken men'

³⁰ The Benedictine Rule forbade meat-eating, except for sick brethren and the children in the monastery. Monks and nuns were allowed to eat *pinguedo*, a type of meat dripping or lard, but had to abstain during Lent and Advent (Hagen, *Handbook of Anglo-Saxon Food*, pp. 94–95).

³¹ Trans. Crossley-Holland, *The Anglo-Saxon World*, p. 227.

³² The comment about Wilfrid's drinking habits appears in the *Life of Wilfrid*, by his biographer Eddius Stephanus, in chapter 21. Wilfrid also distinguished himself by washing every night in holy water, winter or summer. See 'Eddius Stephanus: Life of Wilfrid', in *The Age of Bede*, ed. D.H. Farmer, trans. J.F. Webb, revised ed. (New York, 1988), pp. 105–82. Bede chronicles Æþelðryð's moderate eating habits in *Historia ecclesiastica*, iv, c. 19. Likewise, Bede mentions many food miracles performed by Cuthbert as well as making this comment about the saint in chapter 6 of his life: see 'Bede: Life of Cuthbert', in *The Age of Bede*, ed. D.H. Farmer, trans. J.F. Webb, revised ed. (New York, 1988), pp. 39–102.

³³ Crossley-Holland, *The Anglo-Saxon World*, p. 27.

³⁴ Hagen, *Handbook of Anglo-Saxon Food*, pp. 136–43.

(‘unius mulieris iejunium innumeros stravit exercitus ebriorum’).³⁵ In the biblical version of her story, Judith fasts in accordance with Jewish dietary laws; in the Old English poem, her absence from the feast hall keeps her unpolluted.

Even animals may feast differently in secular and Christian poems. A well-known *topos* of heroic Old English poetry is the description of the ‘beasts of battle’, usually the raven, the eagle and the wolf, who lurk near the battle so that they may feed on the dead bodies of the fallen warriors. In the *Battle of Brunanburh*, for example, the victorious English return to Wessex, leaving behind the ‘horny-beaked raven’, the ‘grey-coated eagle’ and the ‘wolf in the wood’ to devour the corpses with relish.³⁶ In the account of King Edmund’s martyrdom, however, a wolf guards the king’s severed head, not daring to eat it although he is hungry, ‘and for the fear of God he did not dare to taste the head but guarded it against wild beasts’.³⁷

In heroic poetry the Anglo-Saxon feast hall, rich in treasure, food and joy, becomes the centre of communal celebrations that hold society together as well as of the devastation that may tear apart kingdoms. Although the Anglo-Saxons enjoyed their feast halls, the Christian concept of sin seems to have altered the way in which some poets described banqueting scenes. Thus, even in manuscripts that may be contemporary, the shining halls found in *Beowulf* appear in contrast to the licentious banquet of doomed Assyrians in *Judith*. The *hlaford* who guards the bread in *Beowulf* is a secular lord, but in *Judith* he has become Christ, who as part of the Trinity dispenses heavenly rather than secular bread. The multiple interpretations of the feast hall in Old English literature demonstrate poetic awareness of source material and a sense of the appropriate use for the central paradigm of Anglo-Saxon society.

³⁵ Ambrose, *Liber de viduis*, 7, *Patrologia Latina*, 16, col. 260: ‘Nam si Judith bibisset, dormisset cum adultero’ (For if Judith had drunk, she would have slept with an adulterer). Liber de Elia et Ieiunio, 9, *Patrologia Latina*, 14, col. 741: ‘Itaque unius mulieris jejunium innumeros stravit exercitus ebriorum’ (Therefore the abstinence of one woman overcame innumerable [men] of an army of inebriates).

³⁶ Trans. Crossley-Holland, *The Anglo-Saxon World*, p. 21.

³⁷ Excerpt from ‘The Passion of St Edmund’, trans. Crossley-Holland, *ibid.*, p. 231.

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Pilgrims to Table: Food Consumption in Chaucer's Canterbury Tales

Elizabeth M. Biebel

Food consumption plays a role in medieval society that extends far beyond the concepts of sustenance and survival. Bridget Ann Henisch's *Fast and Feast* details the splendour and formalities that accompanied celebratory medieval dinners, as well as the dietary restrictions prescribed by the Catholic Church for solemn observances.¹ *The Medieval Health Handbook*, compiled by Luisa Cigliati Arano, reveals an interest during the middle ages in the natural benefits and detriments that certain foods bring about in the body.² In the late thirteenth and the fourteenth centuries the importance of food was heightened due to its increasing scarcity as a result of recurring famine.³ Given this significant valuing of food, it is only fitting in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* that Harry Bailly suggest the reward for telling the best story should be 'a soper at oure aller cost' (A 799).⁴

While the Canterbury pilgrims are never depicted together at table, there is scattered mentioning of food consumption throughout Chaucer's work. The Monk has a taste for roasted swan; the friar in the *Summoner's Tale* prefers capon liver. While the Franklin is a veritable gourmet, the widow in the *Nun's Priest's Tale* contents herself with a more humble

¹ Bridget Anne Henisch, *Fast and Feast: Food in Medieval Society* (University Park, Pennsylvania, 1978).

² While some of the effects attributed to foodstuffs are far from accurate – *The Tacuinum of Rouen* warns that cabbage is 'bad for the intestines', Luisa Cigliati Arano, *The Medieval Health Handbook: Tacuinum Sanitatis* (New York, 1976), p. 54. – certain beliefs are concurrent with modern nutritional remedies. *The Tacuinum of Vienna* finds dill 'brings relief to a stomach that is cold' (p. 49), and Dr H.C.A. Vogel notes that dill seeds 'have a warming affect and are good for the stomach and intestines, especially in cases of chills', *The Nature Doctor* (New Canaan, 1991), p. 408.

³ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley, California, 1987), p. 2.

⁴ That Innkeeper Bailly stands to profit financially from having an awards dinner at the Tabard is also significant motivation. All quotations of the *Canterbury Tales* are taken from *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3rd edn, ed. Larry D. Benson et al. (Boston, Massachusetts, 1987).

meal of 'milk and broun breed' (B² 2844). Various critics have noted the relevance of Chaucer's food references in relation to an individual character; they analyse how diet may be used as an interpretive guideline for the health, personality or morality of a particular consumer. Keeping in mind that Chaucer's cast of characters is making a religious pilgrimage, the concept of physical food readily lends itself to that of spiritual nourishment. Such a movement can take two directions. While the symbolic nature of the Eucharist highlights the positive elements of food, the sin of gluttony is the result of the abuse of food. These disparate functions that food can assume may incorporate many other polarized facets. The physicality of gluttony in its opposition to the ascetic nature of the Eucharist provides an illustration of the dichotomy of feast versus fast. The exclusion of meat in a fasting diet results in a juxtaposition of animal versus vegetable. Out of this opposition, society has created gender associations for both of these food types.⁵ Men have been and still are associated with animals: they are the hunters, they are known for their physical strength. The high-protein content of meat has contributed to the traditional view that meat is the appropriate food source for men. Conversely, women have been aligned both with vegetation and with butchered animals. While the nurturing, gentle and other so-called feminine qualities are seen as being reflected in plant life, woman's physical attractiveness to heterosexual man is at times described in meat-like terms. Woman does not benefit from her association with dead animals as man does from his link with living ones. For woman the analogy can be both debasing and victimizing. That Chaucer links woman through metaphor to butchered animals does result, however, in a sacred connotation of her gender with the sacrificial nature of Jesus Christ. Chaucer achieves this connection through the process of association. The awareness of the motif in which Christ is given feminized attributes in the middle ages allows the incidents of food consumption found in the *Canterbury Tales* to be interpreted in a religious light that is reverential towards woman, although it does stereotype her in the role of passive victim.

Before the nature of food consumption in the *Canterbury Tales* can be examined as a whole, the significance of diet should be evaluated at the individual level. In the *General Prologue*, there are three pilgrims who are

⁵ In his *Philosophy of Right* Hegel wrote, 'The difference between men and women is like that between animals and plants. Men correspond to animals, while women correspond to plants because their development is more placid', quoted in Carol J. Adams, *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory* (New York, 1993), p. 37.

expressly linked with food consumption: the Monk, the Summoner and the Franklin.⁶ What seem to be trivial details have generated a significant amount of critical commentary that enables the reader to understand more fully the true nature of the character Chaucer has decided to present. Take, for example, Chaucer's Monk. Among the many worldly pleasures this 'lord ful fat' (A 200) enjoys, 'A fat swan loved he best of any roost' (A 206). As Heiner Gillmeister notes, the sixth-century *Rule of Saint Benedict* does not allow members of monastic communities to consume the meat of quadrupeds.⁷ History reveals, however, that clever logicians argued that Benedict's decree could not include two-legged fowl.⁸ Technically, then, the Monk is not breaking a dietary law by indulging in this favourite dish. His specific preference for swan, though, does reveal certain traits that one would not expect to find in a truly ascetic man. Among the medieval prices for fowl that Ramona Bressie indexes, a chicken is valued at two and a half pence, whereas a swan is priced at six or seven shillings.⁹ The Monk, indeed, has an expensive palate; he is not content with humble fare. Further flaws in the Monk's morality are revealed in the writing of Rabanus Maurus: 'Cygnus est superbia, ut in lege prohibetur, ne quis manducet cygnem [Leviticus, 21:18], id est ne exhibeat se elatum . . .'¹⁰ Not only has the swan been associated with the sin of pride, but it has been linked to that of sloth as well.¹¹ Through the connotations that arise from an analysis of the Monk's diet, the reader witnesses this character move from the first of the Seven Deadly Sins to the last. His pride in worldly goods leads him into the spiritual desperation of sloth.¹² With his appetite for costly swan, the Monk falls into both avarice and gluttony in his moral descent.

⁶ While much has been said about the Prioress and her courtly table manners, Madame Eglantyne never consumes a *specific* food item. The reader is only informed of what types of dainties are fed to her dogs. Also, the Cook's portrait consists of the dishes he knows how to prepare; it does not mention what Roger of Ware prefers on his own table.

⁷ Heiner Gillmeister, 'Chaucer's Mönch und die "Reule of Seint Maure or of Seint Beneit"', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 69 (1968), pp. 224–25.

⁸ David Knowles, *The Monastic Order in England* (Cambridge, 1940), p. 462.

⁹ Ramona Bressie, 'A Governour Wily and Wys', *Modern Language Notes*, 54 (1939), p. 488.

¹⁰ Quoted in Beryl Rowland, *Birds with Human Souls* (Knoxville, Tennessee, 1978), p. 171.

¹¹ In *Birds*, Rowland discusses the appropriateness of the likening of friars in the *Summoner's Tale* to 'Jovinyan / Fat as a whale, and walkynge as a swan' (D 1929–30), 'because various proverbial expressions imply that the bird is always thirsty and exemplifies the sin of Sloth' (171).

¹² That the Monk has fallen into the disconsolate throes of sloth is the premise of David E Berndt, 'Monastic Acedia and Chaucer's Characterization of Daun Piers', *Studies in Philology*, 68 (1971), pp. 435–50.

Another character whose moral condition is revealed by dietary preference is the Summoner: 'Wel loved he garleek, oynons, and eek lekes' (A 634). In addition to the state of his soul, the health of the Summoner's body is also perceived through food analysis. Referring to the works of, among others, Bartholomaeus de Glanvilla and Bernardus de Gordon, Walter Clyde Curry diagnoses the Summoner as one who suffers from alopecia.¹³ Medieval medicine attributed the cause of this form of leprosy to impurities in the blood. Connecting the Summoner's diet with his disease, Curry quotes Joannitius and Paulus Aegenita, who believed that indulging in the bulbs and culinary herbs listed above led to ill effects in the bloodstream.¹⁴ Dennis Biggins adds a moral dimension to the Summoner's food consumption by noting the reported 'aphrodisiacal qualities of garlic, onions and leeks';¹⁵ however, the scholar notes that the source he is using, Reginald Pecock's *Reule of Crysten Religioun*, post-dates Chaucer.¹⁶ Biggins hypothesizes that 'the opinion expressed was doubtless current in the fourteenth century',¹⁷ and so it would seem. Additional and slightly more timely support for this theory can be found in the late fourteenth-century *Tacuinum of Vienna* which lists 'influences coitus' among the uses of leeks and 'facilitates coitus' among the benefits of onions.¹⁸ If a reader could possibly be in doubt about the nature of the Summoner's character after reviewing Chaucer's presentation of him, dietary analysis should confirm suspicions of his lecherous personality.¹⁹

A seemingly endless critical debate revolves around the true nature

¹³ Walter Clyde Curry, *Chaucer and the Medieval Sciences* (New York, 1960), pp. 38–43.

¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 45–46.

¹⁵ Dennis Biggins, 'Chaucer's Summoner: Wel Loved He Garleek, Oynons, and Eek Lekes', *Notes and Queries*, 11 (1964), p. 48.

¹⁶ William Cabell Greet, in his Introduction to the *Reule of Crysten Religioun* (EETS 171, 1927), notes that 'Pecock dates his work 1443' (p. ix).

¹⁷ Biggins, 'Chaucer's Summoner', p. 48.

¹⁸ Arano, *The Medieval Health Handbook*, pp. 76, 124.

¹⁹ Two other noteworthy articles on the Summoner and his diet are R.E. Kaske, 'The Summoner's Garleek, Oynons, and Eek Lekes', *Modern Language Notes*, 74 (1959), pp. 481–84; and Chauncey Wood, 'The Sources of Chaucer's Summoner's "Garleek, Oynons, and Eek Lekes"', *Chaucer Review*, 5 (1971), pp. 240–44. Wood notes Garabáty's belief that the Summoner is suffering from secondary syphilis (pp. 240–41) and finds a character analogous to the Summoner in the third book of John Gower's *Vox clamantis* (p. 241). Kaske offers a moral interpretation of the Summoner by comparing his favourite foods to the people of Israel's longing for the foods of Egypt in Numbers, 11:5. Such desire is symbolic of a person's longing for the life of carnality in his/her past.

of the Franklin.²⁰ Labelled as 'epicurus owene sone' (A 336), the Franklin is the pilgrim by far the most associated with food consumption:

Without bake mete was nevere his house,
Of fissh and flesh, and that so plentevous
It snewed in his hous of mete and drynke;
Of alle deyntees that men could thynke,
After the sondry sesons of the yeer,
So chaunged he his mete and his soper.
Ful many fat partrich hadde he in muwe,
And many a breem and many a luce in stuwe.

(A 343–50)

If food consumption may be relied upon as a guide for interpreting the Franklin's character, the man's adherence to a seasonal diet speaks of him in a positive light. Joseph Bryant comments upon Hippocrates' *Regimen in Health*, a work that was influenced by the *Secreta secretorum*, which advocates maintaining a diet that focuses on balancing the humours in one's body as a regimen for good health. Factors such as 'age, season, habit, land and physique' are to be considered in this plan.²¹ The Franklin's adherence to the wisdom of such a scheme is witnessed by 'the fact that a person of his years is able to make the two-day pilgrimage to Canterbury and back'.²² Bryant emphasizes the Franklin's ability to practise temperance in a diet, despite his being constantly surrounded by an abundance of fine foods.²³ This depiction of the Franklin as a temperate individual argues against Jill Mann's rendering of him as a glutton.²⁴ Indeed, the Franklin's balanced and seasonal diet not only indicates good physical health, it also makes a decided statement about his spiritual

²⁰ In *A Commentary on the General Prologue to the Canterbury Tales* (2nd edn, New York, 1967), Muriel Bowden builds a positive view of the Franklin based on his 'sangwyn' (A 333) complexion. The *Secreta secretorum* offers a physiognomy-oriented interpretation of a sanguine personality: 'The sangyne by kynde sholde lowe Ioye and laughyng . . . he shal be fre and lyberall' (quoted, p. 174). On the other hand, D.W. Robertson in his *A Preface to Chaucer: Studies in Medieval Perspectives* (Princeton, New Jersey, 1962), finding a negative reference to Epicureans in Gower's fourteenth-century *Mirour de l'omme*, believes the Franklin is 'blind to anything beneath surface appearance' because he is merely a possessor of the 'Superficial nobility of a wealthy man of the middle class' (p. 276).

²¹ Quoted in Joseph Bryant, 'The Diet of Chaucer's Franklin', *Modern Language Notes*, 63 (1948), p. 321.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 319.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Jill Mann, *Chaucer and Medieval Estates Satire* (Cambridge, 1973), pp. 153–56.

condition.²⁵ Through his distinguishing the time to feast from the time to fast, it may be seen that the Franklin adheres to the dietary laws of his faith more closely than does his fellow pilgrim the Monk.

Chaucer's vivid image of it snowing food and drink in the Franklin's home provides additional commentary for both camps of the Franklin's critics. While Robert Miller believes the precipitation of food is a material substitution for spiritual manna, Hugh Keenan finds no adulteration of the manna image Chaucer provides: 'The snowing of food as in the manna story joins his feast and the Mass'.²⁶ Since the Old Testament's manna is seen as the forerunner of the Eucharist in the New Testament, there is an element of true communion and holy feast to be found within the Franklin's portrait.²⁷ The 'sop in wyn' (A 334) with which the Franklin breaks his fast may also be seen as a Eucharistic image.²⁸ Because Chaucer's characters are making a holy pilgrimage, it is fitting that Eucharistic imagery should be found within the *Canterbury Tales*. Eucharistic imagery does not, however, always appear in the positive context that it does in the Franklin's portrait. A corrupted representation of the Eucharist may be found in the *Pardonner's Tale*. Helen Cooper notes that the bread and wine that the third rioter brings back to his associates become transformed 'into the vehicle of bodily death' for the rioters, not the means of their salvation.²⁹

While physical food assumes its most noble representation within a Christian context in the form of the Eucharistic feast, it is also reduced

²⁵ In 'Carnival Food Imagery in Chaucer's Description of the Franklin', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, 16 (1994), Frederick Jonassen asserts: 'The Franklin's change in diet which accompanies the change in seasons corresponds to the customary alteration between the meat diet typical for the season of Christmas and Shrovetide and the fish diet prescribed by the church for fasting days, especially during Lent' (p. 101).

²⁶ Robert P. Miller, "It Snewed in his House", *English Language Notes*, 23 (1985), pp. 14–16; Hugh T. Keenan, 'The General Prologue to the *Canterbury Tales*, lines 345–46: The Franklin's Feast and Eucharistic Shadows', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 79 (1978), p. 36.

²⁷ Since 'Seint Julian he was in his contree' (A 340), it may be assumed that the Franklin, like the patron saint of hospitality, shared his bounty with others.

²⁸ While *The Riverside Chaucer* defines the 'sop in wyn' as 'A light breakfast consisting of bits of bread in wine' (813), the *Two Fifteenth-Century Cookery-Books* (EETS 91, 1888) provide a detailed recipe of fine bread being steeped in wine and almond milk that has been generously laced with saffron, ginger, sugar, cinnamon, cloves and mace (p. 11).

²⁹ Helen Cooper, *The Canterbury Tales* (Oxford, 1989), p. 269. This point has also been made by John Leyerle, 'Thematic Interlace in the *Canterbury Tales*', *Essays and Studies*, 29 (1976), pp. 107–21, and it is the focus of Robert E. Nichols, 'The Pardonner's Ale and Cake', *PMLA*, 82 (1967), pp. 498–504.

to its basest connotation through the sin of gluttony.³⁰ For Chaucer's Pardoner, gluttony replaces pride as the cause of Original Sin in Eden: 'O cause first of oure confusioun! / O original of oure dampnacioun' (C 468–69).³¹ Regardless of what the specific sin was that motivated Adam and Eve to eat the fruit of the Tree of Life, the Genesis myths provided the Fathers of the Church with ample fodder to construct an allegorical interpretation of the Fall of Man. An example of such exegesis may be found in the *Parson's Tale* (i, 322–49), in which it is explained that Eve represents the flesh or the senses and Adam portrays the intellect. It is through the weakness of the senses that man's reason may be persuaded to succumb to temptation.³² This rationale of sin has generated the misogynistic tradition of viewing woman as a creature of extraordinary appetite. Using Eve's gluttony towards the forbidden fruit as a basis for his argument, Andreas Capellanus wrote:

Woman is also such a slave to her belly that there is nothing she would be ashamed to assent to if she were assured of a fine meal, and no matter how much she has she never has any hope that she can satisfy her appetite when she is hungry . . . she usually likes to eat more than normal.³³

Such attitudes were not confined to literature. A mid fourteenth-century sculpture of the Seven Deadly Sins in the Doge's Palace in Venice depicts Gluttony as a woman who 'holds a jewelled cup in her right hand and gnaws a limb of a bird held in her left'.³⁴

³⁰ The medieval conception of gluttony not only involved overindulgence in food but also the abuse of alcohol. Chaucer's Parson supplies such a definition: 'Glottonye is unmeasurable appetit to ete or to drynke . . .' (i, 817). This union of food and wine in sin further develops gluttony as a dark parallel of the Eucharist.

³¹ In his 'Aspects of Gluttony in Chaucer and Gower', *Studies in Philology*, 81 (1984), p. 43, R.F. Yeager notes that the Pardon's reordering of the cardinal sins agrees with the fifth-century writings of John Cassian. It was Gregory the Great who, in the sixth century, listed pride as the first of the sins. In his discussion of the Seven Deadly Sins, Chaucer's Parson adheres more closely, although not exactly, to Gregory's ordering of the sins and indexes pride as the foremost of them.

³² This allegory originates from Augustine's *De trinitate XII*. In *A Preface to Chaucer*, Robertson offers a thorough explanation of both Augustine's philosophy and Peter Lombard's incorporation of the Augustinian account of the Fall in his *Sententiae* (pp. 74–75).

³³ Andreas Capellanus, *The Art of Courtly Love*, trans. John Jay Parry (New York, 1959), pp. 203–4.

³⁴ Morton W. Bloomfield, *The Seven Deadly Sins* (East Lansing, Michigan, 1952), p. 104. In all due fairness, Gluttony has not been exclusively depicted as a woman in medieval art. An illustration from a fourteenth-century manuscript of the *Roman de la Rose*, reprinted in Robertson, *A Preface to Chaucer*, personifies the sin as a man gulping the contents of the goblet in his right hand (fig. 68).

It is interesting to note that, in the two discussions of gluttony in the *Canterbury Tales*, there is no emphasis placed upon woman as a creature of inordinate appetite. Indeed, the *Pardoner's Tale* uses male historical figures to illustrate the folly of gluttony, and the *Parson's Tale* only refers to the culpability of Eve in its discussion of the allegorical interpretation mentioned above. The absence of such traditional notions causes one to speculate that Chaucer saw beyond the standard conceptions of his day.

If the food consumption that occurs in the *Canterbury Tales* is examined as a whole, a method does begin to emerge. There is a pattern of pure, balanced or even vegetarian intake surrounding the genuinely good individuals in both the *General Prologue* and the separate tales that is countered by a meat-oriented diet evinced by a less upstanding cast of characters. The friar in the *Summoner's Tale* insists that no special attention should be given to the food that will be prepared for him. His requests, however, for 'nat of a capon but the lyvere . . . And after that a rosted pigges heed' (D 1838, 1841), exhibit a pampered nature that desires rich food.³⁵

Another noteworthy point in this tale is found in the Summoner's detailing of a friar's begging. What begins as simple requests for grain and cheese escalates into repeated petitions for 'brawn' (D 1750), and 'Bacon or beef' (D 1753). In the *Reeve's Tale*, Simkin has to send his daughter out for ale and bread, but there is a goose on hand to be roasted for his guests. Symbolic of Simkin's lack of ethics and his misguided worldliness, the Eucharistic symbol of ale and bread is absent from this man's house. As with the rioters in the *Pardoner's Tale*, the image of the key to salvation is not perceived, and the ale and bread contribute instead to a gluttonous feast that climaxes in an evening of vengeful lechery and violence. In sharp contrast to these corrupt diets, the ever-patient Griselda maintains a vegetarian existence, sustaining herself with 'Wortes or other herbes . . . / The whiche she shredde and seeth for hir lyvynge' (E 226–27). The good widow of the *Nun's Priest's Tale* also lives simply, drinking no wine and eating milk and brown bread. Occasionally, she enjoys a treat of bacon and eggs.

At this point, the subtle emergence of a pattern that allies diet with gender should be noted. Those characters who indulge in meat are

³⁵ *The Medieval Health Handbook* informs us that, while liver was believed to be hard to digest, the meat of gelded animals was considered to be extremely tender (p. 126). Roasted meat contributed to a phlegmatic disposition (p. 122) and pork was considered to be 'very nourishing and quickly transformed' (p. 106).

predominantly male; those whose diets are either vegetarian or almost-vegetarian are female.³⁶ Carol Adams has outlined the historical association of animals with man and aggressiveness and, conversely, that of vegetables with woman and passivity.³⁷ Thus it may be seen that Chaucer has not only refrained from personifying gluttony as a woman, but has associated his food-consuming female characters with a patient, even abstemious, temperament.

In his negative representation of the more carnivorous food regimen, Chaucer is not making any direct pro-vegetarian statement; however, there are traces of a humanistic sensitivity in this dietary patterning. For, in addition to the alignment of disreputable natures with the consumption of flesh, there are elements woven into certain segments of the *Canterbury Tales* that link women to meat, thereby suggesting an association between the stereotypically feminine quality of passivity and the killing of animals for food.

The primary example of the association of women with meat is found in the *Merchant's Tale*. When January explains to his friends why he wishes to marry a young woman instead of one closer to his own age, he creates a debasing analogy:

I wol noon oold wyf han in no manere.
She shal nat passe twenty yeer, certayn;
Oold fissh and yong flessh wolde I have fayn.
'Bet is', quod he, 'a pyk than a pickerel',
And bet than old boef is the tendre veel.

(E 1416–20)

³⁶ While the diets of Sir Thopas and the Summoner might initially seem to counter the above assessment, Carol J. Adams, in *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, notes the following social connotation concerning diet and sexuality: 'Men who decide to eschew meat eating are deemed effeminate; failure of men to eat meat announces that they are not masculine' (p. 34). Thus, the point of having the hero of Chaucer's mock-romance munch on gingerbread and liquorice is to highlight his effeminacy. Also, if the hypothesis found in Dennis Biggins, 'Chaucer's General Prologue, A 163', *Notes and Queries*, 6 (1959), pp. 435–36, is correct in its assumption that the Summoner is carrying on a homosexual affair with the Pardonner, the Summoner's taste for vegetables also serves as a commentary on his masculinity.

³⁷ Adams, *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, pp. 34–37. This is not to say that in medieval times the word *vegetable* or any of its derivation had the same extremely passive connotations as it does today. The sense of positive growth surrounded this word to the extent that it was used in religious writing. In the *OED* the earliest listing under *vegetative* reads: '1398 – Trevisa *Barth De P.R.* þe [soule] vegetatyf desyreth to be' (p. 75). The human soul was conceived of as being female in nature during the middle ages.

Were this the only example of equating woman with edible flesh, the passage could be dismissed as a rejoinder to the Wife of Bath's insulting remark that refers to her three, old husbands: 'And yet in bacon hadde I nevere delit' (D 418). Another pointed example of linking women with slain animals is mentioned in the Monk's portrait. This lusty man 'lovede venerie' (A 166). The implications are that this passion is twofold: the Monk not only loves to hunt animals but also desires to prey upon women.³⁸ This association of women with meat ties in neatly with the Parson's transition from his discussion of gluttony to that of lechery: 'After Glotonye thanne comth Lecherie, for thise two synnes been so ny cosyns that ofte tyme they wol nat departe' (I 836). The Pardoner as well addresses 'the fyr of lecherye, / That is annexed unto glotonye' (C 481–82). Women and animals are used to slake these two strong appetites of men.

Traces of the notion of the passive victimization of animals can be found in the Pardoner's diatribe against gluttony when he describes the violence of cooks in the kitchen:

Thise cookes, how they stampe, and streyne, and grynde,
And turnen substaunce into accident
To fulfille al thy likerous talent!
Out of the hard bones knokke they
The mary, for they caste noght awey

(C 538–42)

The concept of breaking the animals' bones is particularly striking here because it falls sixty-four lines after a reference to the mutilation of Christ's own body: 'Oure blissed Lordes body they totere – / Hem thoughte that Jewes rente hym noght ynough –' (C 474–75). The combination of the cooks' actions with a reminder of Christ's Passion recalls the words of Psalm 21;15, 18: 'I am poured out like water; and all my bones are scattered . . . They have numbered all my bones'. From this close association, the symbolism of physical food consumption moves beyond both the genderization of food and its moral commentary until it comes to the spiritual significance of Christ as passive victim, the sacrificial lamb. Just as eating for life entails the death of an organism, so too did Christian salvation require a death for spiritual life. As January likens women to

³⁸ Paull F. Baum, 'Chaucer's Puns', *PMLA*, 71 (1956), pp. 225–46, discusses the *double entendre* of this phrase, yet *The Riverside Chaucer* notes 'the *OED* does not record the latter [sexual] meaning until 1497' (p. 806).

meat, so too is Christ associated with flesh in Isaiah 53,7: 'He shall be led as a sheep to the slaughter and shall be dumb as a lamb before his shearer, and he shall not open his mouth'.

That there is a strong connection between butchered animals and Christ is also evident through the Lord's words at the Last Supper.³⁹ What remains to be seen is how woman fits into this religious connotation. Caroline Walker Bynum has explored a twelfth-century movement among the Cistercians to write about Jesus Christ using maternal terminology and imagery. It is believed that the Cistercians were inspired by the work of the Benedictine monk Anselm of Canterbury.⁴⁰ Anselm based his Prayer 10 to St Paul on the words of Christ in Matthew 23:27:

Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets and stonest them that are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered together thy children, as the hen doth gather her chickens under her wings, and thou wouldest not.

From this nurturing image, Anselm progresses:

But You, Jesus, good lord, are You not also a mother? Are You not that mother who, like a hen, collects her chickens under her wings? Truly, master, You are a mother. For what others have conceived and given birth to they have received from You . . . It is then You, above all, Lord God, who are mother.⁴¹

Because this theme was prevalent among several different writers, it is highly plausible that the well-read Chaucer was familiar with some of these works. Even if Chaucer had not encountered the Cistercian writings, the motif of describing Christ in maternal terms did not remain isolated within this specific religious community. Christ appears in a maternal light in the writings of Dante, Peter of Lombard and Julian of Norwich.⁴² In light of the popularity of this theme, Chaucer may have indeed decided to incorporate it into the *Canterbury Tales*.

The significance of a feminized Christ, then, provides a key to how an audience may interpret the various symbolic levels of food consumption in the *Canterbury Tales*. Since Christ, the Word made Flesh, offered

³⁹ Luke 22:20 reads, 'This is the chalice, the new testament in my blood, which shall be shed for you'.

⁴⁰ Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley, California, 1982), p. 112.

⁴¹ Quoted, *ibid.*, p. 114.

⁴² Julian of Norwich wrote: 'This is Jesus our true mother in nature from our first making', in *Revelations of Divine Love*, trans. M.L. de Masta (Garden City, New York, 1977), p. 190.

his own body as ransom in order to provide spiritual salvation, the food consumption within the *Canterbury Tales* stands as a reminder that Chaucer's colourful and entertaining personalities are actually on a spiritual pilgrimage. While the characters the pilgrims describe in their stories are not in the literal process of making a pilgrimage, they are journeying through this world and moving on towards the next. Those who seem most prepared for the spiritual afterlife – Griselda, the Franklin and the widow of the *Nun's Priest's Tale* – have either renounced meat completely or consume it only in its due season of feast. Those characters who are depicted as heavy meat eaters, the Summoner's friar and the Monk, consequently live a carnal life. Their taste for flesh, most often washed down with wine or ale, leads them toward the sin of gluttony.

Chaucer deepens the spiritual significance of his food patterns not only through highlighting the contrast between the concepts of fasting, goodness and vegetation and those of indulging, sin and meat, but also by establishing the association of women with meat. From this linkage Chaucer moves from the concept of mortal female to spiritual mother. As a result of the motif of the later middle ages in which Christ is depicted in feminine terms, the identity of this spiritual mother is not the Virgin Mary, but her son. Thus, in Chaucer, the antifeminist traditions of depicting woman as glutton, and of emphasizing that the originating cause of the Fall of Man was Eve's uncontrollable appetite, are absent. The passages that align women with meat do not emanate from Chaucer's voice; they are the opinions of his misguided characters. While the stereotype of woman as passive victim is, unfortunately, underscored through his methods, Chaucer does his best to redeem the connotation of women as meat by subtle association with the Redeemer of Christians, who became the ultimate foodstuff of salvation, when He allowed Himself to be butchered.

Fast Food and Urban Living Standards in Medieval England

Martha Carlin

I recently completed a book on the urban development of the medieval London suburb of Southwark in which the concluding chapter concerned urbanization and how one could identify and define it. After examining such classic urban signifiers as fortifications, street plans, societal stratification, occupational diversity, public services, and environmental pollution, I ended on a less serious note by suggesting that one unmistakable hallmark of urbanity in any era is traffic jams, which betoken a densely settled population, abundant commercial activity and a teeming volume of transport. When I was thinking about topics for this essay it occurred to me that another gauge of urbanity might be found in the diversity of foods available for sale, including ready-made or 'fast' foods.

An essential difference between towns and villages is that towns cannot feed themselves. They are always dependent on the import of bulk food supplies from their immediate hinterlands or beyond. In the ancient and medieval world, as in the modern world, two major constraints on the provisioning of large towns were transport costs and food perishability. But, once the food was successfully imported into towns, how was it distributed, prepared, and consumed? And what can that tell us about urban populations, economies and standards of living?

It is my contention, first, that the vending of fast food – that is, hot, ready-to-eat food, not food cooked to order – in medieval English towns flourished primarily not to serve well-to-do residents and travellers, but rather to serve the urban poor. And, second, that as a result, fast food probably was scarce in medieval England except in large towns where the population density was high, and especially where the number of single-adult households was high.

Ancient Roman cities saw exactly this kind of development. Rome itself was a city of apartment blocks or *insulae* reaching up to six storeys in height. In smaller Roman cities, such as Ostia, Pompeii and Herculaneum, such apartment houses had fewer storeys but were otherwise similar. The ground floor of an *insula* typically was occupied by shops and the upper floors by successively cheaper flats, whose tenants had to

carry their water, groceries, waste and rubbish up and down the flights of stairs. Such upper flats normally lacked not only running water but also ovens and hearths. Portable braziers probably were the usual means of heating and cooking in these flats. For example, one *insula* of this type in Rome, on the Via Giulio Romano, survives to a height of four storeys. The ground floor was occupied by shops and the upper storeys by successively poorer flats, none of which had an identifiable kitchen.¹

As a result of such living arrangements, and also because many of the urban poor could not afford expensive fuel, bulk supplies of food or elaborate cooking equipment, poorer Romans seem to have eaten their hot meals in public eating houses and wine bars or from stand-up snack bars and street stalls. The home meals of the working poor consisted largely of bread and vegetables, the bread bought or distributed at public doles already baked, and the vegetables – mostly beans and peas – often already cooked and perhaps heated up at home on a brazier. Those who could afford it would supplement these with such cold ready-to-eat items as olives, lettuce, cucumbers, onions, fruit, cheese, pickled fish, sausage and boiled eggs.² In fact, the urban poor of ancient Rome seem to have been as dependent on convenience foods as many modern city-dwellers.

In the de-urbanized world of the early middle ages, ready-made food probably was a rarity, except for ale, wine, bread, butter and cheese.³ By the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries, however, commercial cooks are recorded in England, especially in major pilgrimage centres.⁴ At Winchester, which reached its medieval peak in the first half of the twelfth century, surveys record three cooks c. 1110, and nine in 1148.⁵ In Paris

¹ John E. Stambaugh, *The Ancient Roman City* (Baltimore, Maryland, and London, 1988), pp. 176–78. Stambaugh comments that the residents of this *insula* ‘must have used charcoal braziers for cooking or have gone out for hot meals’. On Roman *insulae* see also Jérôme Carcopino, *Daily Life in Ancient Rome*, ed. Henry T. Rowell, trans. E.O. Lorimer (New Haven, Connecticut, and London, 1940), pp. 23–28, 37–44.

² Stambaugh, *The Ancient Roman City*, p. 200; see also pp. 148–49, 184, 207, 209; *Roman Civilization, Sourcebook II: The Empire*, ed. Naphtali Lewis and Meyer Reinhold (New York, 1955, reprinted 1966), p. 359.

³ The fourth law code of Æthelred II lists royal tolls at London on fish, wine, hens, eggs, cheese and butter; some other tolls there were to be paid in pepper and vinegar. *The Laws of the Kings of England from Edmund to Henry I*, ed. and trans. A. J. Robertson (Cambridge, 1925), pp. 72–73.

⁴ Ann Hagen, *A Handbook of Anglo-Saxon Food Processing and Consumption* (Pinner, Middlesex, 1992), pp. 11, 18–23, 49–50.

⁵ Frank Barlow et al., *Winchester Studies, 1. Winchester in the Early Middle Ages: An Edition and Discussion of the Winton Domesday*, ed. Martin Biddle (Oxford, 1976), pp. 429, 430.

fast food was available in great variety by the mid thirteenth century, when John de Garland (*c.* 1195–1272) described such popular items there as waffles (*gaufres*), light pastries (*nieules*) and wafers (*oublies*); boiled and roasted beef, veal, mutton, pork, lamb, kid, pigeon, capon and goose; spiced pasties, filled with chopped pork, chicken or eel; and tarts or flans filled with soft cheese or egg.⁶ The street-cries of thirteenth-century Paris, recorded by Guillaume de la Ville Neuve, included references to such prepared foods as hot mashed peas (*pois chaus pilez*), hot beans (*fèves chaudes*), garlic sauce (*allie*), cheese of Champagne and of Brie, fresh butter (*burre frès*), hot pasties (*chaus pastez*), hot cakes (*chaus gastiaus*), hot wafers (*chaudes oublées*), hot pancakes (*galetes chaudes*), rissoles (*roinssoles*), hot flans (*flaons chaus*), hot tarts and simnels (*chaudes tartes et siminiaus*).⁷

London, which was growing rapidly in the twelfth century, had a fast-food outlet by the early 1170s, when Thomas Becket's biographer William Fitz Stephen discussed it at length in his 'Description of London'. According to Fitz Stephen's rather glamorized account, this *publica coquina* was located on the riverside, between the wine-ships and the wine-cellars. It was open day and night, and offered ready-cooked food to suit all tastes and purses, from those of rich knights and foreign travellers to those of the poor. Fitz Stephen described in detail its provision of hot dishes of meat, game, fish and poultry, which were available roasted, fried or boiled.⁸ Modern scholars generally have assumed that Fitz

⁶ Alfred Franklin, *Dictionnaire historique des arts, métiers et professions exercés dans Paris depuis le treizième siècle* (Paris, 1906; reprinted New York, 1968), pp. 242, 359–60, 500, 528, 552; Urban Tigner Holmes, *Daily Living in the Twelfth Century: Based on the Observations of Alexander Neckam in London and Paris* (Madison, Wisconsin, 1952), p. 80.

⁷ There were also cakes called *gastiaus rassis*. Paris, Bibl. Nat., MS fonds français, no. 837, fol. 246, printed in Franklin, *Dictionnaire historique des arts, métiers et professions*, pp. 748–51. Simnels were twice-cooked bread (possibly first boiled, then baked, like modern bagels), made of the finest flour. See *OED*, s.v.; and *Liber Custumarum*, ii, ed. Henry Thomas Riley, *Munimenta Gildhallae Londoniensis*, II, ii (Rolls Series, 1860), pp. 782–83.

⁸ The text printed by Stow reads:

Singulorum officiorum exercitores, singularum rerum venditores, singularum operarum suarum locatores, cotidiano mane per se sunt locis distincti omnes, vt officiis. Præterea est in Londonia, super ripam fluminis, inter vina et nauibus et cellis vinariis venalia, publica coquina. Ibi quotidie, pro tempore, est inuenire cibaria, fercula, assa, frixa, elixa, pisces, pisciculos, carnes grossiores pauperibus, delicatiores diuitioribus, venationum, avium, avicularum. Si subito veniant ad aliquem ciuum amici fatigati ex itinere, nec libeat ieunis expectare, vt noui cibi emanentur et coquantur, 'Dent famuli manibus lymphas panesque', interim ad ripam curritur; ibi præsto sunt omnia desiderabilia. Quantalibet militum vel peregrinorum infinitas intrat urbem, qualibet diei vel noctis hora, vel ab urbe exitura, ne vel hii nimium ieunent, vel alii impransi exeant,

Stephen's *publica coquina* was a single establishment, but three later references (c. 1212–21) refer to the 'cookshops' (in plural) on the Thames in the Vintry.⁹ This riverside location, between the havens of Queenhithe and Dowgate, suggests that the cookshops there catered primarily to river boatmen and dockworkers, and to travellers who arrived by boat, all of whom would especially welcome a hot meal.

By the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries a variety of specialist retailers of ready-to-eat foods can be identified in London and in the larger provincial towns. The Norwich leet roll of 1287–88 mentions a mustard-seller, and sellers of pork sausages and puddings.¹⁰ In 1312–13 there were at least nineteen cooks in one of the four 'leets' (wards) of Norwich;¹¹ and there was a street there called 'Cockrowe' (Cook Row)

continued

illuc, si placet, diuertunt, et se pro modo suo singuli reficiunt. Qui se curare volunt molliter, accipiunt anserem, vel Afram auem, vel attagen Ionicum; non opus ut quid querant, appositis, que ibi inueniuntur, deliciis. Hæc equidem publica coquina est, et ciuitati plurimum expediens, et ad ciuitatem pertinens. Hinc est, quod legitur in 'Georgia' Platonis, iuxta medicinam esse coquorum officium simulacrum, et adulacionem quartæ particulæ ciuitatis.

John Stow, *Survey of London* (1603 edn), ed. C.L. Kingsford (Oxford, 1908, reprinted 1971), ii, pp. 222–23. Kingsford's notes list some variants among the surviving manuscripts of Fitz Stephen. For translations, see Stow, *Survey*, ed. Kingsford, i, p. 79; Stow, *Survey*, ed. H.B. Wheatley (London, 1912, reprinted 1956), pp. 504–5; William Fitz Stephen, *Norman London*, trans. H.E. Butler, with an essay by Sir Frank Stenton (London, 1934; reprinted New York, 1990), p. 52.

⁹ Stow himself translated Fitz Stephen's *publica coquina* as 'Cookes row', but modern translators have generally read it as 'cookshop'. See translations listed in note 8, above, and also Christopher Brooke and Gillian Keir, *London, 800–1216: The Shaping of a City* (London, 1975), p. 115 (where it is called a 'public kitchen'). The earliest of the three later references is the Assize of Building drawn up after the great London fire of 1212, which ordered that all the cookshops on the Thames be whitewashed and plastered inside and out. A deed dating from c. 1219–20 describes a plot of land in the parish of St Martin Vintry as lying 'on the riverbank by the cookshops' (*super ripam ad coquinas*); and another deed, of 1221, mentions the 'cookshops of the Vintry' (*coquinae Vinetrie*). Stow, *Survey of London*, ed. Kingsford, ii, pp. 322–23 (note citing Assize of Building and deed of 1221); *Cartulary of St Mary Clerkenwell*, ed. W.O. Hassall, Camden 3rd series, 71 (London, 1949), no. 241 (deed of c. 1219–20). The cartulary (British Library, MS Cotton Faustina B. II, fos 6–106) was owned by Stow, who underlined the phrase *super ripam* (fol. 67). For 'cellars' (presumably wine-cellars) in this vicinity, see *ibid.*, no. 258 (grant, c. 1198, of a cellar in the parish of St James (Garlickhithe), lying between two other cellars); and Stow, *Survey*, i, p. 238.

¹⁰ *Leet Jurisdiction in the City of Norwich during the XIIIth and XIVth Centuries*, ed. William Hudson, Selden Society, 5 (London, 1891), pp. 6, 8.

¹¹ This was the leet called 'Over-the-Water', which also supported at least fourteen butchers, thirteen dealers in cheese, butter and eggs, eleven dealers in oats, and seven poulterers. *Leet Jurisdiction in the City of Norwich*, ed. Hudson, p. 60.

by 1314.¹² York, which housed Edward I's administration from 1298 to 1305, had thirty-five commercial cooks in 1304;¹³ Leicester had commercial cooks by 1335.¹⁴ In London by the late thirteenth to early fourteenth century there were specialist cooks, flan makers, cheesemongers, saucers, waferers, mustard sellers, and pie bakers.¹⁵

An English treatise of the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century lists the fast foods to be found in towns. Pastelers sold pasties of meat and fish, well spiced (*bene piperatos*), as well as (cooked) meats, game and poultry, both wild and domestic. Flan makers sold cheesecakes and flans (?*opacos artocopos, flaones*) made of eggs, bread, and cheese; at the waferers one would find wafers or griddle cakes (?*lagana*) cooked in irons or ovens.¹⁶ Cooks would also put a customer's meat in dough and bake it; in London the price regulations of 1350 forbade cooks to take more than a penny for putting a capon or rabbit in a pasty, on pain of imprisonment.¹⁷

Langland's poem *Piers Plowman* gives fragments of the street-cries of later fourteenth-century London, in which cooks and their knaves cried 'Hot pies, hot! Good piglets and geese, go dine, go!', while the taverners offered 'White wine of Alsace and red wine of Gascony, of the Rhine and Rochelle', to drink with the meat.¹⁸ The mid fifteenth-century poem *London Lyckpenny* also reports some of the street cries of Westminster

¹² Serena Kelly, Elizabeth Rutledge and Margot Tillyard, *Men of Property: An Analysis of the Norwich Enrolled Deeds, 1285–1311*, ed. Ursula Priestley, The Norwich Survey (Norwich, 1983), p. 26.

¹³ Michael Prestwich, *York Civic Ordinances, 1301*, Borthwick Papers, 49 (York, 1976), pp. 22–24. An inquest of 1304 identified twenty-four white bread bakers, twelve black bread bakers, twenty-six taverners, thirty-five cooks, forty-nine butchers, fifty fishmongers, seventy brewers, thirty-seven poulterers, nine forestallers of fishmongers and twenty-seven regrators who had been active in the city between 1301 and 1304. *Ibid.*, pp. 21–28. See also Heather Swanson, *Medieval Artisans* (Oxford, 1989), p. 17.

¹⁴ G.T. Salisbury, *Street Life in Medieval England* (2nd edn, Oxford, 1945), pp. 73–74, citing *Records of Leicester*, ii, p. 21.

¹⁵ *Calendar of Letter-Books . . . of the City of London*, 11 vols (A-L), ed. Reginald R. Sharpe (London, 1899–1912), *Letter-Book A*, pp. 31, 99, 134, 166, 168; *Two Early London Subsidy Rolls*, ed. Eilert Ekwall (Lund, 1951), roll of 1292, pp. 151, 160; roll of 1319, pp. 234, 268, 271, 336.

¹⁶ BL, Add. MS 8167, fos 88–90; printed by G. Waitz in 'Handschriften in Englischen Bibliotheken', *Neues Archiv der Gesellschaft für altere Deutsche Geschichtskunde*, 4 (1879), pp. 339–43. I am grateful to John Munro for the suggested date of this treatise.

¹⁷ *Memorials of London and London Life, 1276–1419*, ed. Henry Thomas Riley (London, 1868), p. 257.

¹⁸ B-text, Prologue, lines 225–29, printed in *England from Chaucer to Caxton*, ed. Henry S. Bennett (1928; reprinted New York, 1970), p. 144.

and London, many of which concern ready-to-eat food. At Westminster Gate the narrator of the poem, a poor countryman from Kent, is urged by cookshop proprietors to sit down and partake of bread, ale, wine, and fat ribs of beef. In Cheapside, street peddlers hawk hot peascods and fresh strawberries and cherries; in Candlewick Street, hot sheep's feet; and in Eastcheap cooks proclaim their beef ribs and meat pies.¹⁹

It is striking that among the prepared foods recorded in the street cries of thirteenth-century Paris and fourteenth- and fifteenth-century London the emphasis seems to be on *hot* dishes: hot vegetables, hot breads, hot pies, hot ribs, hot sheep's feet, hot roasted meat and poultry, hot cakes and wafers, hot pancakes and flans and tarts. This suggests that such foods were generally purchased for immediate consumption, like a McDonald's hamburger and fries today. But by whom? The three main categories of potential customers would have been those described by Fitz Stephen: wealthy and well-to-do residents, who could afford to pay a premium for ready-to-eat food; travellers, both wealthy and poor; and poor residents, who were unable to buy food or fuel in bulk, and whose lodgings might have limited cooking facilities, or even none at all. Let us examine each of these possibilities in turn.

The houses of wealthy residents normally included extensive kitchen offices, and their household servants included cooks and other kitchen workers. The notorious London vintner Richard Lyons, for example, whose goods were seized and inventoried in 1376, occupied a riverside mansion that included a pantry, buttery, larder, and kitchen. The metal pots and pans and utensils in his kitchen, valued at just under £6 10s. 0d., included four-and-a-half hundredweight of ironware and six hundredweight of brassware.²⁰ No kitchenware of wood or pottery is

¹⁹ *London Lyckpenny*, in *London is London: A Selection of Prose and Verse*, ed. D.M. Low (London, 1949), pp. 29–32. In the mid nineteenth century Henry Mayhew recorded the cries and wares of the street-sellers of food in London. They included four men who sold hot boiled peas (made from dried green peas) to the cry of 'Hot green peas! all hot, all hot! Here's your peas hot, hot, hot!' Mayhew added, however, that the hot peascods described in *London Lyckpenny* were known in many other parts of the country, where, he said, 'it is, or was, customary to have "scaldings of peas", often held as a sort of rustic feast. The peas were not shelled, but boiled in the pod, and eaten by the pod being dipped in melted butter, with a little pepper, salt and vinegar, and then drawn through the teeth to extract the peas, the pod being thrown away'. Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor*, 4 vols (London, 1861–62), i, pp. 158–212 (hot peas, p. 180).

²⁰ Lyons' kitchenware consisted of eight spits, three trivets, a gridiron, two andirons, two frying pans, two racks, two grease pans, two dressing knives, one other knife, one iron flesh hook, two massive iron pestles (weighing $4\frac{1}{2}$ cwt), eight brass pots, a chafing dish and a small basin, together weighing 2 cwt, six brass pails weighing $\frac{1}{2}$ cwt, and three

listed, presumably because the secondhand value of such items was negligible, and so we cannot know if there were any salting troughs, kneading troughs or wooden oven peels. However, it seems likely that Lyons' household bought rather than baked its bread, because the staple foods found in the larder did not include grain or flour.²¹ Also, there is no mention of a brewhouse or brewing vessels, which suggests that Lyons' household also bought rather than brewed its ale.²² A similar set of kitchen equipment was inventoried in 1373 in the house of Thomas Mocking, a wealthy fishmonger, and these inventories are typical of the period.²³

In France in the 1390s an elderly householder, known through his modern editors as 'the Ménagier of Paris', wealthy but not well-born, wrote a book of household management for his fifteen-year-old wife.²⁴ Unusually, he included for her use a large collection of recipes for all kinds of foods, including soups, sausages, vegetable dishes, stews, roasts, pasties, fish and egg dishes, flans, jellies, crêpes, mustard, sauces and preserves. There are even recipes for cooking frogs and snails. He also copied out a selection of sample menus for ordinary dinners and suppers, great feasts, smaller parties and other occasions. It is clear from the Ménagier's text that in his wealthy bourgeois household, as in wealthy households generally, meals were prepared from raw ingredients cooked at home, except for the bread, drink and some of the condiments, and that only for large parties was it usual to employ caterers or to buy quantities of prepared foods.

Travellers might be expected to have been among the chief consumers of hot, ready-to-eat food. However, the locations of cookshops in towns suggest otherwise. In London, for example, the cooks had moved away from the Vintry docks by the 1280s to cluster in Friday Street, to the south east of St Paul's, remaining there until the early 1300s.²⁵ By

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brass mortars weighing $3\frac{1}{2}$ cwt. A.R. Myers, 'The Wealth of Richard Lyons', in *Essays in Medieval History Presented to Bertie Wilkinson*, ed. T.A. Sandquist and M.R. Powicke (Toronto, 1969), pp. 317–18.

²¹ The staples in the larder consisted of honey, salt, vinegar, verjuice and almonds; the spices in the wardrobe included six pounds of gingerbread. (On gingerbread, see below, pp. 102–4.)

²² Myers, 'Wealth of Richard Lyons', pp. 315, 318–19.

²³ Mocking's eight-room house contained furnishings valued at £238 16s. 3d., including kitchenware worth £4 8s. 0d., *Calendar of Plea and Memoranda Rolls of the City of London*, 6 vols (1323–1482), ed. A.H. Thomas (Cambridge, 1926–61), 1364–81, pp. 154–56.

²⁴ *The Goodman of Paris (Le ménagier de Paris)*, ed. and trans. Eileen Power (New York, 1928).

²⁵ *Calendar of Letter-Books, B*, ed. Sharpe, pp. 4, 104, 159.

the 1320s they had shifted slightly east to Bread Street; in the 1350s both Bread Street and Ironmonger Lane were recognized cookshop districts; and by 1410 the centre of the trade had moved to Eastcheap.²⁶ None of these streets lay near the gates or the waterfront. Across the river in Southwark the poll tax return of 1381 listed six cooks and four pie bakers among those assessed. None of these, however, seems to have lived near London Bridge, the choicest commercial location for traders hoping to sell to travellers crossing the river by bridge or boat. Instead, three of the ten, all paying average or above-average assessments, lived around the middle of the High Street; another three, all with average or below-average assessments, lived at the foot of the High Street, near the Marshalsea and King's Bench prisons, which may have supplied them with customers; and four, all with below-average assessments, were among a group of 174 poor householders, mostly single adults, who apparently were clustered within the precinct of St Thomas's Hospital.²⁷

The spending habits of poor visitors to medieval towns are, of course, almost impossible to document, but there are many surviving travel accounts that document the expenditures of wealthy travellers, and these reveal a positive aversion to fast food. For example, the earliest surviving English household account lists the daily expenses of an unidentified household in London and Windsor during the month of October sometime in the late twelfth century. At London the household's food expenditures consisted of daily purchases of ale, frequent purchases of bread and occasional purchases of modest amounts of pottage, eggs, fish, spices,²⁸ wine, flour, apples, herbs,²⁹ mustard, peas and milk. No meat or poultry was purchased, and there is only one recorded payment, of a penny, to a baker.³⁰ This suggests that the unidentified lord's household did its own cooking

²⁶ *Calendar of Coroners Rolls of the City of London, AD 1300–1378*, ed. Reginald R. Sharpe (London, 1913), p. 155 (1326); *Calendar of Plea and Memoranda Rolls, 1323–1364*, ed. Thomas, pp. 251, 255 (1355); *Chronicles of London*, ed. C.L. Kingsford (Oxford, 1905; reprinted Dursley, Gloucestershire, 1977), pp. 268, 341 (1410).

²⁷ PRO, E 179/184/30; Martha Carlin, *Medieval Southwark* (London and Rio Grande, Ohio, 1996), appendix I, figure 3, and table 7.3. The poll tax entry numbers (in appendix I) for the six cooks and four pie bakers are: nos 390–91, 550, 604–5, 616, 631, 779–80, 802–3, 876, 930 and 960.

²⁸ The spices purchased were salt, pepper, cumin, saffron and sugar.

²⁹ Garlic, onions and savory.

³⁰ *Household Accounts from Medieval England*, ed. C.M. Woolgar, British Academy, Records of Social and Economic History, new series 17 (Oxford, 1992), i, pp. 107–10. At Windsor the household's food purchases consisted only of ale, bread and herring. From the

and supplied much of its own provisions. There is no reference in this account to any purchases from the riverside *publica coquina* so extolled by Fitz Stephen.

In the spring and summer of 1267 Sir Roger Leyburn was engaged in various military duties on behalf of the crown, which entailed numerous journeys. While his expense accounts for a three-day stay in Canterbury at the beginning of Lent (6–8 March) record purchases of fish and shellfish, almonds, rice, oil, dried fruit, and spices in quantity, the only prepared foods that he seems to have purchased there were wine, ale, bread, mustard, and vinegar. Even his sauces were made from scratch, from ginger and cinnamon bought for that purpose.³¹ Leyburn was back in Canterbury for one day at the beginning of June, after a week of negotiations in Calais and nearby Wissant, to meet a party of two French counts and one hundred knights. He arrived from France on 1 June and travelled the same day to Canterbury, where he threw a banquet for them. It probably is due to this haste and the need to provide so immediately for a large party of hungry travellers that his expenses at Canterbury on 1 June included 16s. 2d. for sixty-eight capon pasties, the only hot food that he seems to have bought ready-made.³²

In the winter of 1337 a wealthy East Anglian widow, Dame Katherine de Norwich, travelled to Norwich. She arrived in January and stayed until April or beyond. Her accounts show that she supplied many of her household's provisions while in Norwich from her own Norfolk and Suffolk manors. Bread was made from her own wheat and oatmeal from her own oats, although she paid to have the grain milled and the loaves baked in the city. Ale was brewed from her own barley. Whole carcasses and hams and some poultry were supplied from her own manors. Additional livestock and live poultry, fresh meat, fish and shellfish were purchased as needed, as were preserved fish and modest amounts of

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style of the hand and the weekdays and feast days mentioned, Woolgar dates this account to one of the following years: 1168, 1174, 1185, 1191, 1196 or 1202.

³¹ *In gingibor' canell' . . . ad salsationem faciendam x s'*. Alun Lewis, 'Roger Leyburn and the Pacification of England, 1265–7', *English Historical Review*, 54 (1939), pp. 193–214; the accounts for 28 February–6 June 1267 (from PRO, E 101/3/9, m. 4) are printed on pp. 211–14.

³² His other kitchen purchases on that day were bread, wine, ale, almonds, rice, new beans, cloves and ginger, one-and-a-quarter carcasses of beef, bacon, mutton, geese, chickens, pigs, fish (various), porpoise, eggs, sauce and two ells of canvas *ad coquinam*; he also served six peacocks, which he had received as gifts. The kitchen expenses for the day totalled £9 15s. 7⁴d. Lewis, 'Roger Leyburn', p. 214.

wine, fresh and dried fruit, milk, eggs, spices, vegetables and herbs.³³ The only prepared foods that she purchased were the occasional halfpennyworth of pottage and small quantities of condiments (mustard, vinegar and galantine). On the anniversary of her late husband's death she held a great dinner at Norwich for which she purchased large quantities of meat, poultry and game-birds, 1200 eggs, and the necessary spices and condiments. Most of the food, as usual, was prepared at home, but evidently her kitchen facilities and staff had reached their limit, for the day's account also records the purchase of twenty-four baked hens and 157 *pyes*, and of 200 loaves of wastel bread that were distributed to the poor.³⁴

Later that same year, at Christmas time in 1337, the abbot of Ramsey (Huntingdon) went to London at the behest of the king to meet some visiting cardinals.³⁵ He and his party travelled about fifteen to twenty-five miles each day. The first two nights they stayed at Elsworth and Therfield, which were Ramsey manors, the third night at Ware in Hertfordshire and on the fourth day they reached London, where the abbot stayed in his own town house. At Elsworth the abbot and his party consumed bread and wine carried from Ramsey, and herring from the manor's larder, and purchased only ale. At Therfield they consumed herring from stock and purchased bread, ale, oysters, fish,³⁶ garlic and mustard. At Ware, where they stayed at an inn or in hired lodgings, the abbot purchased bread, ale, mutton, pork, fresh fish, eggs, flour, salt, saffron and mustard, and also kitchen fuel. Thus, although the abbot's party purchased quantities of ale, bread, mustard and raw foods along their route, not once do they seem to have purchased any hot, ready-to-eat food, even at Ware, which for centuries was the first major overnight stop north of London. Similarly, in London, where fast food was plentiful, the abbot purchased almost no prepared foods other than bread, wine, ale and condiments (mustard and galantine). The only hot foods he bought were a pennyworth of pottage each day, fifteen pasties for 4d., and 2d. worth of baked lampreys. Some of the food for his Christmas banquet – ten hens and capons and twenty-six *pyes* – was sent out to be baked, at a cost of 18d., but the only hot foods that he purchased

³³ *Caulibus*, onions and garlic.

³⁴ *Household Accounts from Medieval England*, ed. Woolgar, i, pp. 203–27 (accounts for anniversary dinner, pp. 204–5). The account notes that ninety-two *fercula* (messes) were served at this dinner.

³⁵ His travel account is printed in Sir William Dugdale, *Monasticon Anglicanum*, ed. John Caley, Henry Ellis, and Bulkeley Bandinel, ii (London, 1819), pp. 583–86. For this reference I am grateful to Nigel Ramsay.

³⁶ Smoked herring, fresh fish and stockfish.

on that occasion were the daily pennyworth of pottage and a pennyworth of fritters.³⁷ An equally modest degree of outside catering can be seen in the accounts of the abbot of Shrewsbury, who spent about three weeks in London a few months later, in February-March 1338. While he supplied his table with a variety of meats, seafood and poultry, and with modest amounts of vegetables, oatmeal, frumenty and rice, he bought no prepared foods at all except for an occasional purchase of wastel bread, mustard and galantine, even having his bread baked in-house.³⁸

One might have expected that travellers along the Great North Road between London and Scotland would have purchased quantities of ready-to-eat hot food at the major stopping-points along the way but, although they bought raw food in plenty, on this road also the fast food that they purchased seems to have been limited to bread, pottage and condiments. For example, when the earl of Ross travelled from London to Scotland in October 1303,³⁹ only once (at Nottingham, where he bought some cheese) do his accounts record that he purchased provisions to take along for the road. He seems to have had no difficulty buying substantial amounts of ale, bread, meat, fish, poultry and eggs wherever he stopped, although the selection clearly was greater in cities and large towns than in small towns. However, the only ready-to-eat foods recorded in his daily accounts, apart from ale and wine, were bread and pottage. Even at York, where he stopped for four nights, and where, as we have seen, there were dozens of cooks at this time, his meals seem to have been cooked to order, and the only prepared foods recorded in his accounts there were bread, pease pottage and condiments.⁴⁰

³⁷ The foods purchased by the abbot in London, in addition to the pottage, baked pasties (*pastellis furnitis*) and baked lampreys (*laumpriis furnitis*), consisted of oysters, beef, mutton, whole sheep ('*skaldyng'*), fresh fish, eggs, lampreys, shrimps, geese, gurnards, ginger, garlic and onions. On Christmas Day the abbot's household consumed twenty-four hens, three capons, three partridges, one-and-a-half sheep and half a veal, and purchased bread, wine, ale, pottage, mutton and beef; paid for the baking of ten hens and capons and of twenty-six *pyes*, bought a bushel of salt for salting the meat; and also purchased apples and fritters (*frutuyris*), eggs, flour, *skirwhittes* (skirrets: water-parsnips) and verjuice.

³⁸ J. Armitage Robinson, ed., 'The Household Roll of Bishop Ralph of Shrewsbury (1337-8)', in *Collectanea, i, A Collection of Documents from Various Sources*, ed. T.F. Palmer, Somerset Record Society, 39 (1924), pp. 134-57.

³⁹ PRO, E 101/365/9, mm. 2r-4r.

⁴⁰ His purchases included bread, ale, red and white wine, pears, almonds, geese, pullets, doves, larks, herring, lampreys, perch, roach, sauces, pease pottage, salt and fresh herring, haddock, codling, eels and dace (served with mustard, galantine, verjuice, and onions), beef, pork and mutton (seasoned with salt and garlic), apples and salmon.

Seventy-five years later, in the summer (May–June) of 1378, Edmund Mortimer, earl of March, travelled from London to Scotland as a commissioner to discuss border issues with the Scots. His travel accounts show that he and his party had no trouble obtaining large supplies of food and drink along the road, and indeed were so confident of being able to do so that the only foodstuffs that the earl carried with him from London were spices: three pounds of saffron, sixteen pounds of powdered ginger, and eight pounds of ground pepper. However, all the food that they purchased on their journey, with the exception of ale, wine, bread and sauces, was purchased raw and cooked from scratch. They purchased no hot foods at all, not even at such major stopping-places as Ware, Royston, Huntingdon, Stamford, Grantham, Newark, Doncaster, Darlington, Durham and Newcastle-on-Tyne.⁴¹ Similarly, Chaucer's fictional pilgrims, who were travelling along the busy road from London to Canterbury, evidently did not expect to be able to find suitable ready-to-eat food along the way, since they brought their own cook with them to prepare their food.⁴²

Yet we know that there were commercial cooks, sometimes dozens of them, in cities such as Canterbury, Norwich, York and London. Wealthy travellers would not have been deterred by reasons of economy from paying for the convenience of getting fast, hot food, so why didn't they patronize these cooks? An itemized list of the foods sold by London cookshops is recorded in 1378, when the mayor and aldermen set the legal prices that cooks could charge for their wares. The most expensive items were game birds. A roast bittern was priced at 20d., a heron at 18d., and a pheasant at 13d. Next came roasts costing 6d. to 8d. each: pork (8d.), lamb (7d.), goose (7d.) and curlew ($6\frac{1}{2}$ d.). The price of a plain roasted capon was 6d.; a capon baked in a pastry was 8d. In the 3d. to 5d. price range were roast hen, at 4d. each, or baked in a pastry for 5d.; rabbit, at 4d. each; and mallards, at $3\frac{1}{2}$ d. to $4\frac{1}{2}$ d. each (the lower price for tame mallards, the higher for wild birds). For $2\frac{1}{2}$ d. one could buy a roast pullet, teal or woodcock, or three roast pigeons. The cheapest items were small roasted birds: one could buy three thrushes for 2d., a snipe or five larks for $1\frac{1}{2}$ d., and ten finches or ten eggs for a penny. Thrifty customers who provided their own poultry for a pastry were to be charged

⁴¹ BL, Egerton Roll 8728, printed in *Household Accounts*, ed. Woolgar, i, pp. 245–58. The size of the party is not given, but the number of horses employed fluctuated from about seventy to about 150.

⁴² 'A Cook they hadde with hem for the nones/To boille the chiknes with the mary-bones' (etc.). Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson (Boston, 1987), *Canterbury Tales, General Prologue*, lines 379–87.

$1\frac{1}{2}$ d. for the dough, baking, and 'trouble' for a capon, or 2d. for a goose.⁴³

It is clear from this list that the cooks of London had at least some well-to-do clients. It is likely that much of their more substantial custom came from catering for the guild feasts, dinner parties, weddings and funerals of those who hosted these festivities but did not have their own large kitchens and staff.⁴⁴ Why did wealthy residents and travellers routinely shun the cookshops? The answer seems to be, at least in part, that cooks in general had a reputation for dishonesty and uncleanliness. The Norwich leet roll of 1287–88, for example, cites men from nearby Sprowston for selling sausages and puddings (*hillas et pudinges*) in the Norwich market that were made of measled pigs (*porcos superseminatos*) and were unfit for human consumption.⁴⁵ In the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries the cooks and pastelers (*pastiliarii*) of Norwich were repeatedly accused of reheating pasties and meat that were two or three days old.⁴⁶ In York, ordinances of 1301 forbade cooks to buy fresh meat in summertime that had been on sale for more than a day, or to sell pasties that were badly cooked or filled with unwholesome meat, but in 1304 the cooks there were said collectively to have been guilty on every count.⁴⁷ In London in 1327 the cooks were among nine victualling companies

⁴³ *Memorials of London*, ed. Riley, p. 426. In 1350 and again in 1362–63 London cooks had been forbidden to charge more than a penny for putting a capon or rabbit into a pastry. *Ibid.*, p. 157; *Calendar of Letter-Books*, G, ed. Sharpe, p. 150.

⁴⁴ In 1355 a London chaplain invited some friends for supper, and served veal that he had purchased from a local cook. The supper evidently was a disaster and the chaplain sued the cook in the mayor's court, alleging that the veal had been reheated and unwholesome, 'stinking and abominable', to the danger of himself and his friends. The cook, Henry de Walmesford, was acquitted on the testimony of six of his fellow-cooks who inspected the meat and pronounced it wholesome, a finding confirmed by public inspection. *Calendar of Plea and Memoranda Rolls*, 1323–64, ed. Thomas, p. 251. In 1424 the cooks of York claimed that thenceforth they were to have a monopoly over the catering of feasts, funerals and weddings (Swanson, *Medieval Artisans*, p. 17). The fifteenth-century accounts of the brewers' and goldsmiths' companies of London record payments to cooks and their assistants for preparing dinners and feasts. William Herbert, *The History of the Twelve Great Livery Companies of London*, 2 vols (London, 1834–36), i, pp. 77–80 (Brewers, 1419, 1425), ii, pp. 238–39 (Goldsmiths, 1474, 1495, 1498, 1499).

⁴⁵ *Leet Jurisdiction in the City of Norwich*, ed. Hudson, p. 8.

⁴⁶ In 1312–13 they were also accused of reheating fish. *Leet Jurisdiction in the City of Norwich*, ed. Hudson, pp. 13, 15, 16, 19 (1287–88), 32 (1288–89), 49 (1295–96), 54 (1299–1300), 60 (1312–13). Cf. the amercement of a cook in 1390–91 for selling an unwholesome cooked goose, p. 71.

⁴⁷ Prestwich, *York Civic Ordinances*, pp. 15–16, 21.

who were identified in a royal writ as 'lax in their work' and who were ordered to be punished.⁴⁸

In 1380 a set of ordinances was imposed on the pastelers of London, because they had been illegally making pasties of unwholesome rabbits, geese and 'garbage' (offal),⁴⁹ 'sometimes stinking', and had also been baking beef into pasties and selling it as venison. The new ordinances forbade the pastelers to bake rabbits and geese into pasties, or to sell beef pasties as venison. We are not told where the pastelers had obtained their putrid rabbits and geese, but they evidently purchased their offal at the back doors of up-market cookshops and wealthy households. This is revealed by an additional injunction, which forbade the pastelers to buy 'any garbage' of capons, hens or geese from any cook of Bread Street, or from cooks at the private houses of great lords, to bake into pasties.⁵⁰ Similar ordinances were promulgated in fourteenth-century Winchester and Nottingham.⁵¹ Much the same picture is to be found in Coventry, where in 1421 cooks were forbidden to sell reheated meat; to cast feathers, hair or pig entrails in the street; to sell the best goose for more than 4d.; or to buy dead pike or eels to bake into pies.⁵² In York in 1424 the cooks' own company ordinances acknowledged that untrained women did much of the actual cooking, and ordered that thenceforth 'the wives of any other artisans should not bake, boil nor roast food in public shops, for sale, unless they are competent to do so'.⁵³

Contemporary literature also presents a picture of sleazy pie shops. Chaucer's Cook of London, Hodge of Ware, had a suspiciously ulcerated leg and was mocked by Harry Bailly, the Host of the Tabard Inn in

⁴⁸ *Calendar of Plea and Memoranda Rolls, 1323–64*, ed. Thomas, p. 45.

⁴⁹ Two fifteenth-century English cookery books include recipes for 'garbage' that begin: 'Take fayre garbagys of chykony, as the hed, the fete, the luyerys, an the gysowrys'. *Two Fifteenth-Century Cookery-Books*, ed. Thomas Austin, EETS, original series, no. 91 (London, 1888), pp. 9, 72.

⁵⁰ *Memorials of London*, ed. Riley, p. 438; *Calendar of Letter-Books, H*, ed. Sharpe, p. 139. Bread Street evidently was known for its respectable cookshops; cooks of Bread Street were routinely empanelled to scrutinize the products sold by other cooks and pie bakers of London. Cf. cases in 1355, 1373 and 1374 in *Calendar of Plea and Memoranda Rolls, 1323–1364*, ed. Thomas, p. 251; *ibid.*, 1364–1381, p. 163; and *Calendar of Letter-Books, G*, ed. Sharpe, pp. 332–33.

⁵¹ Keene, *Winchester Studies 2*, p. 274 and n. 8.

⁵² *The Coventry Leet Book or Mayor's Register*, ed. Mary Dormer Harris, EETS, original series, vols 134–35 (1907), p. 26. In 1474 the cooks of Coventry were forbidden to seethe, roast or bake unwholesome meat or fish, or to reheat it, on pain of 40d. for the first two offences, and the pillory for a third. *Ibid.*, pp. 398–99.

⁵³ Swanson, *Medieval Artisans*, p. 17.

Southwark, as notorious for his soggy pasties, his reheated pies, his unwholesome parsley garnishes and his fly-filled shop.⁵⁴ Hodge's identification with Ware may be intended to reflect the unappealing character of the cookshops there, which would explain why wealthy travellers did not patronize them. His unsavoury shop finds an earlier parallel in France in the early thirteenth-century sermons of Jacques de Vitry. 'I have heard', he said, 'of a certain butcher who used to sell cooked meats.' When one of the butcher's customers, hoping to get a discount, said that he had bought meat from no one else for the past seven years, the butcher replied in astonishment, 'you have done this for so long a time, and you're still alive?'.⁵⁵ In Paris in the 1390s the *Ménagier* included recipes in his household book for making sausages, puddings and pasties, but did not suggest that his wife purchase these from a commercial cook, although he did recommend the system used by Paris cookshops to fatten geese.⁵⁶ In England, the saying 'God sends meat, but the devil sends cooks' had become proverbial by the 1540s.⁵⁷

Since people of means evidently avoided cookshops, the cooks' main clientele must have been the poor, for whom hot meat, and even hot food, was a luxury.⁵⁸ In *Piers Plowman*, Langland writes that poor townsmen with families lived on bread and thin ale, with perhaps a scrap of cold meat or stale fish; while poor widows, who kept themselves and their children by spinning, spent their meagre earnings on rent, milk and oatmeal.⁵⁹ François Villon draws a very similar picture of the diet of the poor in mid fifteenth-century Paris. The friars and nuns, he says scornfully, enjoy flans, capons and fat hens;⁶⁰ the wealthy layfolk regale

⁵⁴ Chaucer, *Canterbury Tales*, *General Prologue*, lines 379–87, and *Cook's Prologue*.

⁵⁵ *The Exempla . . . of Jacques de Vitry*, ed. Thomas Frederick Crane (1890; reprinted New York, 1971), pp. 70, 201.

⁵⁶ *Goodman of Paris*, ed. Power, pp. 223, 224, 248–50, 269–70, 278, 282, 291–92, 308.

⁵⁷ John Simpson, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Proverbs* (Oxford, 1982), p. 94.

⁵⁸ This was true even in the countryside. Langland asserts that during the lean months of the year, in late winter and spring, poor peasants made do with cheese, curds, oatcakes and loaves made of peas and beans. Lacking even eggs and bacon, their main hot food consisted of vegetables and baked apples. After the harvest, however, they demanded not only fresh food, but hot food: meat and fish, either fried or baked, and served up piping hot. *Piers Plowman*, B-text, passus VI, lines 282–313. Similarly, Chaucer's poor widowed dairywoman, who lived with her two daughters in a little cottage, survived on slender meals made up largely of cold food – milk and brown bread – with bacon and an occasional egg as her main source of hot food. *Nun's Priest's Tale*, first 26 lines.

⁵⁹ *Piers Plowman*, C-text, x, lines 71–97.

⁶⁰ Villon, *The Poems of François Villon*, ed. and trans. Galway Kinnell (Boston, 1977), 'The Legacy', lines 249–52: 'Item je laisse aux Mendians/Aux Filles Dieu et aux Beguines/Savoureux morceaulx et frians/Flaons, chappons, grasses gelines'.

themselves on good wines, sauces, stews, fat fish, tarts, flans, poached and fried eggs, cream, frumenty and rice;⁶¹ while the poor make do with toast made of brown bread, eaten with onions, leeks, curds (*mathon*) and soup (*potee*; a ‘potful’ of anything), or starve all year round on a diet of barley bread or oat bread and water. When patrons need refreshment in the brothel where Villon lives and works, he offers them water, cheese, bread and fruit – all cold foods.⁶²

The poor in medieval English towns, like the poor of imperial Rome, often had scanty cooking facilities or even none at all. Purpose-built kitchens, with ovens as well as hearths or fireplaces, were largely restricted to the houses of the wealthy.⁶³ In Colchester in 1301, only 3 per cent (eleven out of 389) of the taxpaying households were described as having a kitchen.⁶⁴ The rows of small houses built for rent to artisans typically lacked kitchens altogether.⁶⁵ Those whose lodgings included a hearth, or perhaps the shared use of one, still might own little or no cooking equipment, nor might they be able to buy staple provisions or fuel in bulk. A number of inventories survive that allow us to look right inside the homes of individual householders to see not only what kitchen facil-

⁶¹ Villon, *Poems*, ed. Kinnell, ‘The Testament’, lines 249–52: ‘Bons vins ont, souvent embrochiez/Saulces, brouetz et gros poissons/Tartes, flans, oefs fritz et pochiez/Perdus et en toutes façons’; lines 1762–64: ‘... seigneurs ou dames/Souef et tenu-drement nourris/De cresme, fromentee ou riz’.

⁶² Villon, *Poems*, ed. Kinnell, ‘The Testament’, lines 1485–87, 1493–94, 1595–97.

⁶³ In the fourteenth century such kitchens were still frequently housed in detached buildings. John Schofield, *The Building of London from the Conquest to the Great Fire* (London, 1984), p. 91.

⁶⁴ *Rotuli parliamentorum*, ed. Record Commission, 6 vols (n.d., c. 1767–83; index vol. 1832), i, pp. 243–65. In London, one detached kitchen, dating to the late fourteenth century, was found in excavations in Abchurch Lane, although elsewhere in the city demand for space seems more commonly to have pushed the kitchen into the main house-building. John Schofield and Alan Vince, *Medieval Towns* (London, 1994), p. 72.

⁶⁵ For example, in 1335 in York a carpenter contracted to build a row of seven rental houses, each consisting simply of a ground-floor room and a jettied chamber above, with a chimney. L.F. Salzman, *Building in England down to 1540: A Documentary History* (rev. edn, Oxford, 1967), pp. 430–32. There are surviving examples of such rows at York at Lady Row (60–72 Goodramgate), built c. 1316 as a row of nine or ten two-storeyed houses, each storey containing a single room of about ten feet by fifteen feet; and a similar row in Newgate, built in 1337. Royal Commission on Historical Monuments, *York Historic Buildings in the Central Area: A Photographic Record* (London, 1981), p. 11, pls 117, 135. These rows are discussed in Philip Short, ‘The Fourteenth-Century Rows of York’, *Archaeological Journal*, 137 (1979), pp. 86–136. Archaeological evidence of houses one room deep has been found in London (eleventh century), Winchester (thirteenth or early fourteenth century), Norwich and Perth. Schofield and Vince, *Medieval Towns*, p. 74.

ties they had, but even what cookware and food they contained.⁶⁶ For example, in the fourteenth-century London coroners' rolls, many of the men named for murder or manslaughter were said to have had no chattels; of those with chattels, many had no cooking equipment or tableware.⁶⁷ In fact, in the nine surviving rolls, only seven entries list kitchen utensils among the goods of accused felons.⁶⁸ The kitchen items most commonly noted were brass pots, of which the cheapest was valued at about 6d., or more than a day's wages for most Londoners,⁶⁹ while the most expensive cost 6s. or more.⁷⁰ A man who killed his wife in 1339, for example, had chattels worth 15s. 5d., of which the only kitchen utensil was a brass pot valued at 3s.⁷¹

Similar levels of poverty can be documented in other English towns at this time. In Oxford, the coroner's rolls and the records of the eyre of 1285 record that, as in London, many of the accused felons had no

⁶⁶ See, e.g., Christopher Dyer, *Standards of Living in the Later Middle Ages: Social Change in England, c. 1200–1520* (Cambridge, 1989), p. 206.

⁶⁷ One such man was William de Grymbsy, a shopkeeper of the parish of St Benet Fink who killed a man in 1322. His chattels consisted of three small pigs, a board (*shipp'bord*), a broken chest and table, a pair of sheets, a blanket, a cloth and other small things, altogether worth only 6s. 11½d. Of two men who killed a third in 1323, one (a fishmonger) had no chattels, and the other (whose occupation is not given) had chattels worth only 21d., consisting of two worn sheets, a blanket, a cloak and a chest containing half a bushel of beans, but no cookware or tableware. *Calendar of Coroners Rolls*, ed. Sharpe, pp. 70–71.

⁶⁸ Other kitchen items recorded included brass and iron pans, a brass bowl, a tin pitcher, trencher knives, basins and ewers, and a few items of tableware: costrels, wooden cups, a mazer, and some posnets and dishes. *Calendar of Coroners Rolls*, ed. Sharpe, pp. 74–75, 75–76, 87–89, 147–48, 161–63, 173–74, 245–47. Cf. *Calendar of Letter-Books, B*, ed. Sharpe, pp. 256–79 (London coroner's roll, 1275–76, and roll of felonies, 1278; many of these entries are given in full in *Memorials of London*, ed. Riley, pp. 3–20). Similar lists of brassware occur among the items pledged by defaulting London debtors in 1303. *Memorials of London*, ed. Riley, pp. 48–50; see also pp. 199–200.

⁶⁹ The daily wages of skilled building workers in southern England rose during the fourteenth century from 3d. in the 1340s to 5d. in the 1390s; those of unskilled craftsmen rose from 1½d. to 3d. per day during the same period. Christopher Dyer and Simon A. C. Penn, 'Wages and Earnings in Late Medieval England: Evidence from the Enforcement of the Labour Laws', *Economic History Review*, 2nd series, 43 (1990), p. 305; reprinted in Christopher Dyer, *Everyday Life in Medieval England* (London and Rio Grande, Ohio, 1994), p. 167.

⁷⁰ Before the fourteenth century clay pots were commonly used for cooking, but in the fourteenth century these were increasingly superseded by much more expensive pots and pans of metal, chiefly brass. J.B. Ward Perkins, *London Museum: Medieval Catalogue* (London, 1940, reprinted 1975), p. 220; Michael R. McCarthy and Catherine M. Brooks, *Medieval Pottery in Britain, AD 900–1600* (Leicester, 1988), p. 107.

⁷¹ *Calendar of Coroners Rolls*, ed. Sharpe, pp. 245–47; cf. pp. 87–89, 183–84.

chattels, those with chattels often had very little, and few had any kitchenware.⁷² An especially full set of inventories was compiled at Colchester in the course of the assessment of a fifteenth in 1301. The return gives details of personal property for 389 taxpayers in the town and its suburbs, listing all items of value, both domestic and commercial.⁷³ Items relating to food include metal cookware; stocks of wheat, rye, barley, oats and oatmeal; pigs, cattle and sheep; fresh and preserved meat; beans and peas; and a few miscellaneous other foods, such as spices and lard. Stocks of malt are noted in thirty households, but stocks of ale do not appear; wine is noted in two entries, and fish in only one. Poultry and dairy products are not mentioned and evidently were not assessed.

The overwhelming impression conveyed by this return is that the general standard of living in Colchester in 1301 was low and that many of the taxpayers, who after all represented the economically sufficient householders,⁷⁴ bought their food from day to day, lacking the resources to buy it in bulk, and perhaps also lacking the means to cook it at home. For example, of the 389 taxpayers, only 47 per cent (184 out of 389) owned any metal cookware. Despite the fact that this assessment was taken at Michaelmas, just after the harvest, only about 44 per cent (171 out of 389) had stocks of grain or oatmeal. Forty-six per cent (177) owned cattle or sheep, and 40 per cent (155 out of 389) owned pigs. Only 2 per cent of the households (nine out of 389) had beans or peas; and about 1.5 per cent (six out of 389) had some salt meat.

Another striking feature of this list is the absence of prepared foods available at retail in the town. Two men sold mustard, and one had some vinegar, but no other condiment or sauce;⁷⁵ one woman, a huckster, had 15d. worth of bread for sale.⁷⁶ Of the two identifiable cooks, one

⁷² In 1298, for example, a man from Holywell, who fled after killing a man, had only a worn hanging and a pair of worn sheets, altogether worth 20d. *Oxford City Documents, Financial and Judicial, 1268–1665*, ed. J.E. Thorold Rogers, Oxford Historical Society, 18 (1891), pp. 145–236 (coroners' rolls and eyre), pp. 153–54 (chattels worth 20d.).

⁷³ *Rotuli parliamentorum*, i, pp. 243–65; see also a briefer assessment for Colchester in 1296 on pp. 228–38. The four suburbs are *Lexeden, Miland', Grenested, et West Donylond infra libertatem ejusdem Burgi existent'*. The assessment of 1301 is described in M.W. Barley, *The English Farmhouse and Cottage* (London, 1961), pp. 18–20; both assessments are discussed in George Rickword, 'Taxations of Colchester, AD 1296 and 1301', *Transactions of the Essex Archaeological Society*, new series, 9 (1906), pp. 126–55.

⁷⁴ They included a handful of priests and heads of religious houses.

⁷⁵ *Rotuli parliamentorum*, i, pp. 250 (Robert le Mustarder).

⁷⁶ *Rotuli parliamentorum*, i, p. 254 (Agnes la Regraterere). Her 15d. worth of loaves for sale (*pane venal*) were the only taxable chattels she possessed.

had 3s. worth of fish; the other had no commercial stock on hand.⁷⁷ The assessors listed no stocks of bread among the chattels of the seven identifiable bakers, and two of them also lacked any stock of grain.⁷⁸ The near-absence of commercial food stocks suggests that much of the commercial baking and cooking at Colchester was done with dough and meat supplied by the customers.

These inventories all date from the 1280s to the 1330s, when the population was at or near its medieval peak, and when poverty was widespread. In the century and a half following the Black Death the living standards of peasants generally rose, but Michel Mollat has argued that 'the scene of poverty shifted from the countryside to the cities'.⁷⁹ He found, for example, that among the agricultural labourers in the grain-producing areas of the Ile-de-France the poverty rate was only 10–12 per cent in the fifteenth century. In heavily urbanized Hainaut, Artois, Brabant and parts of Holland, however, about 20 to 30 per cent of the population were poor, while in Basel, Genoa, Lübeck, Augsburg and Dijon the level of poverty was even higher, sometimes much higher.⁸⁰

There are a number of extant city-wide enumerations of population and food stocks for continental cities that support Mollat's grim picture. At Reims in February 1422, for example, recent rises in the price of grain triggered the city authorities to conduct a census of residents ('mouths') and their stocks of rye, wheat and oats. The returns of two of the city's thirteen parishes survive, those for Saint-Hilaire and Saint-Pierre. They were among the wealthiest parishes in the city, at the heart of the main commercial district.⁸¹ Their returns yield a picture of urban

⁷⁷ Thomas Cocus (*Rotuli parliamentorum*, i, p. 247) had chattels worth 18s. 8d., including a cooking pot, a pan and the fish; Dyke Coquus (p. 254) had only 4s. worth of chattels, comprising a surcoat (2s.) and two piglets (2s.).

⁷⁸ The seven identifiable bakers are: John de Geywood (*Rotuli parliamentorum*, i, p. 247; assessed for 63s. 5d. in chattels, including wheat and rye), William son of Note (p. 256; 21s. 7d. in chattels, including wheat), Walter Motekyn (p. 257; 11s. 9½d. in chattels, including wheat and rye), Thomas Tynnot (p. 257; 44s. 8d. in chattels, including wheat), William Pistor de Schrebstrate (p. 258; 20s. 6d. in chattels; no grain), Peter Pistor (p. 258; his only chattel a tunic valued at 19d.), and Germanus Pistor (p. 263; 7s. 6d. in chattels, including wheat).

⁷⁹ Michel Mollat, *The Poor in the Middle Ages: An Essay in Social History*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (New Haven and London, 1986), p. 233.

⁸⁰ Mollat, *Poor in the Middle Ages*, 233–35; Bronislaw Geremek, *The Margins of Society in Late Medieval Paris*, trans. Jean Birrell (Cambridge and Paris, 1987), p. 81 n. 57.

⁸¹ Pierre Desportes, 'La population de Reims au XVe siècle', *Moyen âge*, 77 (1966), pp. 463–509. The return for the parish of Saint-Hilaire listed 1810 residents in 472 households; that of Saint-Pierre listed 1365 residents (to which should be added about twenty for eight blanks in the MS) living in 381 households. Saint-Pierre definitely, and

provisioning strongly resembling that of Colchester in 1301. Almost half the households of Saint-Hilaire, and 41 per cent of the households of Saint-Pierre, had no stocks of grain at all.⁸² The return for Saint-Pierre also listed stocks of peas and beans (*potage*), and bacon (*lars*); only about 10 per cent of the households had these. In that parish almost a third of the households, representing 20 per cent of the population of the parish, had no stocks of provisions at all, not even the least quantity of peas and beans. Not surprisingly, it was the richest households that had the largest stockpiles of food. In Saint-Pierre twelve households, representing 6 per cent of the residents, had more than 39 per cent of the stocks, and in Saint-Hilaire twelve households, representing only 5 per cent of the inhabitants, accounted for 44 per cent of the stocks.⁸³

In England, Christopher Dyer has found extensive evidence that urban living standards in general were rising during this period, exemplified by such indicators as increased consumption of meat and larger, better-built housing.⁸⁴ However, there clearly remained a large stratum of poor town-dwellers, whose needs were not met by public charity. In fifteenth-century Worcester, for example, with a population of about 4000, he found that the municipal charities could provide for only about 120 paupers, representing 3 per cent of the population, while the elderly alone should have made up at least 9.5 per cent of the population, or close to 400 people.⁸⁵ The full number of paupers in Worcester may have been twice that figure. David Shaw has estimated that the poor in late medieval Wells numbered up to 20 per cent of the population, in line with sixteenth-century figures for Coventry (about 25 per cent), Norwich (22 per cent) and Worcester (2 to 20 per cent).⁸⁶

Many of the urban poor in late medieval England, despite generally

continued

Saint-Hilaire probably included infants in these enumerations; both also included religious. The total population of the city at this time probably was about 9000. *Ibid.*, pp. 479–80, 495.

⁸² Of those with stocks, the principal grain was rye (listed for 55 per cent of households), followed by wheat (33 per cent) and oats (12 per cent).

⁸³ None of the latter twenty-four householders was a grain merchant. Desportes, 'La population de Reims,' pp. 504–8. Interestingly, ten out of the eleven bakers listed in the returns had no grain stocks themselves, and the eleventh only a modest supply, suggesting that the bakers were forbidden to deal in grain themselves, and that their principal work was baking dough furnished by their customers. *Ibid.*, p. 505 and n. 112.

⁸⁴ Dyer, *Standards of Living*, chapter 7, pp. 188–210. Cf. pp. 67–70, below.

⁸⁵ Dyer, *Standards of Living*, pp. 252–53.

⁸⁶ David Gary Shaw, *The Creation of a Community: The City of Wells in the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1993), p. 229.

rising wages and falling food prices and rents, were unable to afford the rent of an entire house. This was especially true of single adults. For example, the accounts of the churchwardens of the London church of St Mary-at-Hill for 1483–85 list ten men, including three of the church's stipendiary priests, who each rented a single chamber from the church, at annual rents ranging from 6s. 8d. to 12s. The same accounts also list two male tenants who shared a house.⁸⁷ Some working men had meals provided as part of their wages. In the 1420s, some of the carpenters and other workmen doing day-work at St Mary-at-Hill were given, as part of their wage, noontime dinners of bread, ale and joints of mutton or ribs of beef.⁸⁸ But many single working men did not receive meals as part of their wages, and would have had to take their meals out.

Elderly and invalid men who lived alone seem generally to have been considered unable to cook for themselves. This is suggested by the regulations and intake records of almshouses, which heavily favoured male inmates. Of the 326 or so medieval hospitals and almshouses in England and Wales that at some stage in their existence housed the non-sick poor,⁸⁹ the sex of the poor inmates is known for 169 houses. More than half of these (eighty-nine houses; 52 per cent of 169) took poor men only. A third (fifty-six houses; 33 per cent of 169) took both men and women, and several of these took no single or widowed women, but only the wives of almsmen. A mere 14 per cent (twenty-four houses) took poor women only.⁹⁰ For example, at the hospital of the Holy Saviour in Wells (founded in 1436) David Shaw has found that, of thirty-one alm-speople whose sex is known, twenty-four (77 per cent) were men. Only

⁸⁷ *The Medieval Records of a London City Church (St Mary at Hill), AD 1420–1559*, ed. Henry Littlehales, EETS, original series, 128 (London, 1905), pp. 112–13, 115.

⁸⁸ These meals were described as *nonsiens* (nuncheons) or *none mete*. *Medieval Records*, ed. Littlehales, pp. 64, 65, 71 (1426–29). Forty-five years later, in 1479–81, the churchwardens were no longer providing dinners for workmen, but they did sometimes supply them with snacks of bread and ale, and an occasional breakfast (pp. 102, 104); this custom had largely disappeared, however, by the 1490s. In Durham, the masons hired in 1398 and 1402 to rebuild the dormitory of the cathedral priory were given their meals in addition to a set fee for the work and a new gown each year. Salzman, *Building in England*, pp. 473–77.

⁸⁹ David Knowles and R. Neville Hadcock, *Medieval Religious Houses, England and Wales* (rev. edn, London, 1971), pp. 339–410. In all they list about 1103 hospitals and almshouses (the number is approximate because there is uncertainty in some cases about the nature of the foundation or the existence of the house). Many of these houses also had other inmates, such as poor wayfarers, local sick people or scholars, in addition to their staffs of brothers and sisters.

⁹⁰ The sex of the poor inmates is unknown in 157 of these houses (48 per cent of 326).

seven (23 per cent) were women, and at least two of these were admitted because their late husbands had been benefactors of the house.⁹¹

Poor single women and widows, who were thus largely excluded from the almshouses, must have fared badly. Some shared a house with another; for example, the rental of the London church of St Mary-at-Hill for 1483–85 lists two widows who shared a house at the annual rent of 8s.⁹² Some unmarried women boarded with families.⁹³ But many must have lived in garret rooms and other cheap lodgings, lacking not only kitchens but even hearths. Widows especially were often identified as a needy group. In Coventry in the early 1520s, where there were almost nine times as many widows as widowers, about half of these widows lived alone, many of them, according to Charles Phythian-Adams, ‘in extreme poverty’.⁹⁴ In London, widows of husbands who died seised in fee of a family home were entitled to their ‘free bench’ for life or until they remarried. That is, they had the right to the exclusive use of the hall, the principal private chamber and the cellar, and to share in the use of the kitchen, stable, privy and courtyard.⁹⁵ However, this custom only protected the widows of home-owners, and was no protection for those who lived in rented accommodation. The latter could have remained only for so long as they paid the rent, and many must have ended up moving into cold, cheerless rooms. Some evidence for this can be seen in the wills of poor widows, in which bequests of articles of clothing and bedding are common, while furnishings, cooking utensils and tableware occur much less frequently. This is the picture suggested by Robert Wood’s recent study of the archdeaconry court wills of forty-nine poor London

⁹¹ Shaw, *Creation of a Community*, pp. 241–43.

⁹² *Medieval Records*, ed. Littlehales, p. 115.

⁹³ Some single women boarded with families. In the 1470s–80s the rates paid by poor women for bed and board ranged from 6d. a week in Romford (Essex), to 16d. a week in Exeter and London; by contrast, the board costs in Cambridge of a lawyer’s fiancée and her maid came to 3s. 4d. a week. PRO, C 1/67/20 (Romford), C 1/60/168 (Exeter), C 1/64/764 (London), C 1/61/584–85 (Cambridge). In 1381 the London widow who had been the guardian for the previous four years of the son of Sir Thomas Salesbury claimed costs of 5s. a week for the meals of the boy and his servants. *Memorials of London*, ed. Riley, p. 448.

⁹⁴ Charles Phythian-Adams, *Desolation of a City: Coventry and the Urban Crisis of the Late Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1979), p. 92.

⁹⁵ Barbara A. Hanawalt, ‘The Widow’s Mite: Provisions for Medieval London Widows’, in *Upon My Husband’s Death: Widows in the Literature and Histories of Medieval Europe*, ed. Louise Mirrer (Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1992), p. 23. This was more generous than the common law of England, which allowed a widow to remain in the capital messuage for forty days only (*ibid.*, p. 41 n. 5). For an Oxford lawsuit over free bench, see *Oxford City Documents*, ed. Thorold Rogers, pp. 234–35 (eyre of 1285).

widows for the years 1393–1415.⁹⁶ The thirty-five women's wills surviving in the registers of the consistory court of London for the years 1514–47 give a similar impression: the bequests of well-to-do women generally included kitchenware or tableware, as well as furniture, furnishings and other household items. The poorer women, however, often left little beyond clothing and bedding. Their wills suggest that these women ended their days in cheap lodgings and bare rooms, unprovided with the means to make their own meals.⁹⁷ Indeed, in 1541 one husband acknowledged this likelihood in his will, mourning that his estate was 'to little for the perfirmance of my beriall and to rendre my wyfe a poore chambre'.⁹⁸

For all such households the only source of baked food, and often of hot food of any sort, would have been the commercial bakers and cooks. At least some municipal authorities saw cookshops as places intended specifically to provide hot food for the poor. London, as we have seen, attempted to legislate price controls on the foods sold by cooks in 1350, in 1362–63 and in 1378; in 1379 the pie bakers of London were specifically ordered to 'bake pasties of beef at one halfpenny, just as good as those at a penny', on pain of a fine of half a mark.⁹⁹ Other towns also tried to enforce the availability of such cheap, hot fare. In Coventry in 1427, for instance, the cooks also were ordered to *make halpeny pyes as other Townes doth* on pain of half a mark for each default.¹⁰⁰

In fact it seems likely that cooks and cookshops can serve as a rough gauge of population and economy in medieval towns. They are not, as we have seen, an indicator of wealth: wealthy residents and travellers alike seem generally to have avoided cookshops, preferring to buy raw food in bulk and to have it prepared and cooked for them in their homes or lodgings, except when they were entertaining such large numbers that their own kitchens and staff were insufficient. Nor are cookshops a simple indicator of poverty: the poor in small or underpopulated towns lived in meagre bare dwellings, but had hearths and could boil or fry

⁹⁶ Robert A. Wood, 'Poor Widows, c. 1393–1415', in *Medieval London Widows, 1300–1500*, ed. Caroline M. Barron and Anne F. Sutton (London and Rio Grande, Ohio, 1994) pp. 59–69. (This essay gives an impressionistic rather than a statistical account of the provisions of the wills of forty-nine 'poor' and 'very poor' London widows, making my comment about the relative references of clothing/bedding and kitchenware/tableware tentative rather than certain.)

⁹⁷ *London Consistory Court Wills, 1492–1547*, ed. Ida Darlington, London Record Society, 3 (London, 1967).

⁹⁸ *London Consistory Court Wills*, ed. Darlington, no. 128.

⁹⁹ *Memorials of London*, ed. Riley, pp. 157, 432; *Calendar of Letter-Books, G*, ed. Sharpe, p. 150.

¹⁰⁰ *Coventry Leet Book*, ed. Harris, p. 111.

hot food at home, although they must have carried their bread dough, pies and joints of meat to the ovens of the local bakers. Rather, I would suggest, as a rough rule of thumb, that in a town where the cooks were about as numerous as the bakers or outnumbered them, one would expect to find a high population density, and probably a high ratio of single-adult households, where poor residents were crowded into cheap lodgings that were unprovided with the means to cook a meal. In a town where, by contrast, the bakers greatly outnumbered the cooks, the population density probably was much lower, and the percentage of single-adult households probably also was much lower.

Population studies for several towns provide some evidence for testing this model. Around the year 1300, for example, Colchester, with a population of about 3000,¹⁰¹ had seven identifiable bakers and only two identifiable cooks;¹⁰² while York, which was much more densely inhabited, had some three dozen bakers and an equal number (thirty-five) of cooks.¹⁰³ In Winchester there were about twelve bakers in 1300. As the population there fell in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, so too did the number of bakers: only about six or seven bakers were active in Winchester at any one time between c. 1360 and c. 1380, and only about three to five were working at a time in the first three-quarters of the fifteenth century.¹⁰⁴ In the fourteenth century there were about as many cooks as bakers in Winchester, but as the city's population continued to erode in the fifteenth century the number of cooks there dropped below the number of bakers. The few remaining cooks also sold fresh meat and fresh and salt fish,¹⁰⁵ which suggests that there were insufficient customers for meat pies and cooked meats to keep even the small number of cooks in business. The poll-tax returns of 1377 and 1381 provide some comparative figures for Worcester and Southwark. Worcester had a population at that time of about 2500–3000 people.¹⁰⁶ Most of the householders there

¹⁰¹ Richard Britnell, *Growth and Decline in Colchester, 1300–1525* (Cambridge, 1986), p. 16.

¹⁰² *Rotuli parliamentorum*, i, pp. 243–65 (1301).

¹⁰³ Prestwich, *York Civic Ordinances*, pp. 21–28 (1304).

¹⁰⁴ Keene, *Winchester Studies*, 2, pp. 254–55.

¹⁰⁵ Keene, *Winchester Studies*, 2, i, pp. 273–74 and table 26. (N.B.: the victualling entries in table 26 are mistakenly printed back to back, rather than on facing pages.) Winchester's population fell from a total of about 10,000–12,000, c. 1300, to c.5000–8000 in 1400; by the early to mid sixteenth century it had fallen again to about 3400–5300 residents. *Ibid.*, i, pp. 142–43, 366–68.

¹⁰⁶ Caroline M. Barron, 'The Fourteenth-Century Poll Tax Returns for Worcester', *Midland History*, 14 (1989), p. 7.

were married, and only about 13 per cent were single men or women.¹⁰⁷ In contrast, Southwark, with a population of about 2000–2100,¹⁰⁸ had an extremely high ratio of singletons: 41 per cent of the householders there were single adults.¹⁰⁹ Strikingly, the return for Worcester identifies three bakers and no cooks,¹¹⁰ while the return for Southwark lists six bakers and ten cooks (six cooks and four pie bakers).¹¹¹

In conclusion, it seems to me that what we are seeing here is a pattern that was as familiar in the past as it is today. Fast food flourished in medieval English towns among those who could least afford it, but whose circumstances made it irresistible. For the working poor, especially those living alone, snatching a meal in the middle of the day, or returning exhausted to a chilly room after the markets were closed,¹¹² fast food vendors offered a hot meal that was ready to eat and required no time-consuming, laborious preparation and clean-up. For the very poor and the homeless, who lacked access to cooking facilities and equipment, and who did not have stocks of food and fuel, fast food was often their only source of hot food at all. Those colourful street cries of Paris and London, so vividly reported by Guillaume de la Ville Neuve, William Langland and the unknown author of *London Lyckpenny*, therefore represent not only the liveliness and opportunities of medieval city life, but also its darker side of poverty, misery and hunger for a hot meal.

¹⁰⁷ For this tabulation I have used Barron's figures from 1377 of 845 total taxpayers and 313 wives (p. 3), 159 servants and seven children (p. 14), forty-eight single-person households (p. 13), and eleven unmarried householders with servants or children (p. 14).

¹⁰⁸ Carlin, *Medieval Southwark*, chapter 5, 'Population'.

¹⁰⁹ Of the 576 householders in Southwark, 19 per cent were single men and 22 per cent were single women. Carlin, *Medieval Southwark*, table 5.4.

¹¹⁰ PRO, E 179/200/27, printed in Barron, 'Fourteenth-Century Poll Tax Returns for Worcester', pp. 24–29. Worcester's 1381 return largely excludes single men, single women and servants. *Ibid.*, pp. 6–7.

¹¹¹ PRO, E 179/184/30; Carlin, *Medieval Southwark*, appendix 1.

¹¹² In London the cookshops, unlike the markets, were open at night. Fitz Stephen noted that the *publica coquina* near the river was open day and night (*qualibet diei vel noctis hora*). In 1410 the king's sons Thomas and John were eating supper in Eastcheap on midsummer eve after midnight when they became embroiled in an affray; this led to the imposition of a nine o'clock curfew on the cookshops and taverns. *Chronicles of London*, ed. Kingsford, pp. 268, 341.

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Did the Peasants Really Starve in Medieval England?

Christopher Dyer

My title is taken from a chapter heading from *The World We Have Lost*. In that distinguished book on historical demography and social structures in early modern England, Peter Laslett was anxious to enquire if the English had suffered the same miseries as their French contemporaries, revealed in Goubert's work. In England, although Laslett felt that conditions were far from idyllic, and that in some years the harvests failed in successive years, as in the 1590s, periodic episodes of high mortality were more likely to be the products of epidemic disease than crises of food supply.

In characteristically colourful fashion he produced an example of an individual who showed that some people survived the threats of the period. This was Alice George, who encountered John Locke in Oxford in 1680. She said that she was 108 years old, having been born in Salt-wich in Worcestershire, and remembered at the age of sixteen going to see Elizabeth I at Worcester in the year of the Armada in 1588. The old lady's claims make a good story, though she must have been misleading Locke, as Elizabeth visited Worcester in 1575. Nor can she be defined as a peasant, if we use the term to describe a small-scale rural cultivator. Alice George came from the salt-making town of Droitwich, and had lived in an urban environment for all of her life. But let us not be too pedantic about this example; the point is that, although she had experienced hunger in her youth, she had lived to a ripe old age. Incidentally, she attributed her longevity, not to abstinence from the pleasures of life of which centenarians normally boast, but to her avoidance of any medicines.¹

¹ P. Laslett, *The World We Have Lost* (2nd edn, London, 1971), pp. 115–16; reissued as, *The World We Have Lost, Further Explored* (London, 1983), pp. 124–25. Various scholars have contributed information and advice to this paper, including Mark Overton, Richard Smith and Christopher Thornton. Earlier versions of this essay were given as papers at the universities of Birmingham, Exeter and Kent. I have benefited from comments and criticisms made on those occasions. I am grateful to Joel Rosenthal and Martha Carlin for their subsequent help.

More recent research, using quantitative rather than anecdotal evidence, has served to confirm Laslett's belief that English people in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries did not suffer major crises of subsistence. Appleby argued that the people of the north suffered in bad years because, unlike their southern and midland contemporaries, they did not have inferior grains on which to fall back when bread corns failed – there was nothing cheaper than the oats grown exclusively in much of the northern uplands. Even in the north the rise in agricultural productivity in the seventeenth century, and the improvements in the marketing network, meant that the English rural population suffered much less in the crises of the 1690s than did their French counterparts.² More recent work has offered an even more optimistic picture. If those relying on wages were most vulnerable as food prices were driven up by shortages, we now understand that earlier calculations of real wages exaggerated the poverty of those who received them, because they did not take sufficient note of the earnings of the whole family, nor of such benefits as payments in kind, nor of the availability of cheaper food than that recorded in the accounts of institutions normally used as sources of data. Even our view of the plight of the unemployed or partially employed has been raised by new and more positive assessments of the effectiveness of the poor law system.³

If the peasants did not starve in England in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, how far back must we look to find a different situation? In the early middle ages there are plenty of chronicle accounts of famine deaths. Indeed for the Continent Bonnassie has attempted a typology of such descriptions, picking out reports of cannibalism as indicating an especially severe episode.⁴ English chronicles record famines in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, and the price series suggest some

² A.B. Appleby, 'Diet in Sixteenth-Century England: Sources, Problems, Possibilities', in C. Webster, ed., *Health, Medicine and Mortality in the Sixteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1979), pp. 97–116; A.B. Appleby, *Famine in Tudor and Stuart England* (Stanford, California, 1978).

³ J. Walter and R. Schofield, eds, *Famine, Disease and the Social Order in Early Modern Society* (Cambridge, 1989); S. Rappaport, *Worlds Within Worlds: Structures of Life in Sixteenth-Century London* (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 123–61; P. Solar, 'Poor Relief and English Economic Development before the Industrial Revolution', *Economic History Review*, 48 (1995), pp. 1–22.

⁴ P. Bonnassie, 'Consommation d'aliments immondes et cannibalisme de survie dans l'occident du haut moyen âge', *Annales: économies, sociétés, civilisations*, 44 (1989), pp. 1035–56. Cf. Chapter 5, below.

very bad harvests at the end of the twelfth century and in 1201–4.⁵ Our focus must be the period between 1204 and 1500, with a view to discovering when the threat of starvation receded.

We could attempt to investigate the question of peasant hunger by anecdote – my example is Margaret Norton of Hartlebury in Worcestershire (not far from Alice George's birthplace, but Margaret lived in a village and can be regarded as a real peasant). When she was buried on 12 September 1545 the compiler of the parish register noted that she had died when she was sixteen days short of her 122nd birthday.⁶ Now we should be as sceptical of this piece of folklore as of Locke's gullible account of Alice George, except that a widow called Margaret Norton appears in the Hartlebury records of the 1490s, and if it was the same person who died in 1545 she must have been very old. She had certainly survived the food shortages of the 1480s and 1520s, even though she may not have been old enough to have experienced the famine of the late 1430s.⁷

These isolated individuals have an immediate interest for us, but they cannot provide us with conclusive evidence to solve our problem. Instead I will turn to more scientific evidence for peasant eating and for their lack of food, beginning with the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, and then turning to the period after the Black Death and the supposed lifetime of Margaret Norton.

Peasant food in the decades around 1300 is recorded in some detail by agreements to maintain retired peasants in manorial court rolls. A characteristic example was the record of the transfer of a five-acre holding in 1328 at Oakington in Cambridgeshire by Richard Valletus to John, son of John Sybily.⁸ Richard had made a contract with his successor that he should be provided with a retirement home converted from the former bakehouse of the holding. His 'pension' was to come partly from access to a curtilage (a garden) next to the house and seven selions of land; and partly from an allowance each year of two bushels of wheat and two bushels of rye, both at Michaelmas, and of four bushels of barley and four bushels of peas at Christmas. This could be interpreted in a commercial light – the purchaser of the land was providing an annuity the size of which was related to market demand. While we should not ignore

⁵ D.L. Farmer, 'Prices and Wages', in H.E. Hallam, ed., *The Agrarian History of England and Wales*, ii, 1042–1350, pp. 717–18, 722, 787–88.

⁶ Hereford and Worcester County Record Office, ref. 985/B.A. 5807, vol. 1, fol. 4.

⁷ Hereford and Worcester County Record Office, ref. 009:1 B.A. 2636/169 92372.

⁸ Queen's College Cambridge, 7 (I am grateful to Richard Smith who provided me with a transcript of this document).

the shortage of land and John's willingness to sacrifice a great deal to gain a precious holding at that time, the wording of other agreements makes it clear that non-commercial considerations, such as the local customary rules about what was decent and fitting for the support of an elderly person, played some part in the fixing of the amounts.⁹ The allowances had been obtained from the crops of the holding and were intended for the consumption of the retired peasant, not for sale. Richard Valletus was being provided with the raw materials for the baking of bread (from wheat and rye, and perhaps barley), and the major ingredients of a thick pottage (peas and some of the barley). The total allowance of twelve bushels would not have provided much grain for ale, as a good deal of the calorific value of the barley would be lost in brewing, and to obtain approximately 2000 calories per day it would have been necessary to have consumed the barley in solid form. A good number of maintenance agreements did provide twelve bushels or thereabouts, suggesting that many retired peasants did not drink ale regularly.¹⁰ In Richard Valletus's case, ale consumption *would* have been possible because he had crops from seven selions – perhaps two acres. Above Valletus in the hierarchy of village society were prosperous peasants, often tenants of a yardland of thirty acres or so, whose allowances of sixteen or twenty-four bushels, or even more, would have contained enough food to feed a servant, and plenty of malting grains to allow them regular and abundant ale consumption.

The maintenance contracts, as well as indicating the different levels of food and drink consumption among peasants with varied resources, also tell us a good deal about the marked regional differences in eating patterns, from the wheat-eating peasants of the south east – the inhabitants of counties like Essex and Surrey enjoyed especially high levels of wheat-bread consumption – while quantities of rye were consumed in Norfolk and Worcestershire. Norfolk grew limited quantities of wheat, and the peasants there often ate barley bread, as they did in parts of Suffolk. There were important differences also in the pottage and brewing corns – ale brewed from barley malt was available in many counties, but the meagre amounts of barley and the prominence of oats in the

⁹ The agreements are discussed in R.M. Smith, 'The Manorial Court and the Elderly Tenant in Late Medieval England', in M. Pelling and R.M. Smith, eds, *Life, Death and the Elderly* (London, 1991), pp. 39–61; C. Dyer, *Standards of Living in the Later Middle Ages: Social Change in England, c. 1200–1520* (Cambridge, 1984), pp. 151–54.

¹⁰ C. Dyer, 'English Diet in the Later Middle Ages', in T.H. Aston, P.R. Coss, C. Dyer and J. Thirsk, eds, *Social Relations and Ideas: Essays in Honour of R.H. Hilton* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 197–206.

allowances of Essex and Somerset peasants suggest the use of malted oats to brew an inferior ale. Similarly in Surrey, Norfolk and Hampshire, peasants were not allowed many pulses (peas and beans) and their pot-tages would have been based on oatmeal or barley.¹¹ A few contracts mention the availability of food and drink in addition to cereals and legumes. Some allow the retired peasant the use of a garden or orchard. A few make specific reference to supplies of cider. The keeping of pigs, poultry and other animals imply that the diet included eggs, bacon and dairy products. Carcasses of salted meat were to be delivered annually to a few prosperous retired peasants.

These maintenance agreements, summoning up as they do a picture of at least adequate quantities of bread, pottage and sometimes ale, give a rather favourable picture of peasant diet. First, they tell us only about the diet of those with land holdings that could be used as the basis for a retirement contract. Some agreements specify such small quantities of grain – eight bushels or less – that they must have provided only a small proportion of the income of the retired peasant. The existence of poorer people who ate much less well is indicated by a comparison between contracts from Somerset manors and toll corn payments recorded for the mills of Taunton in the same county. The toll corn presumably reflects the balance of overall grain consumption in the district, because most grain was ground by households or commercial food processors, whereas the contracts for maintenance relate to the retirement of the better-off peasants. While wheat accounted for almost two-thirds of the retired peasants' grain allowances, and rye and maslin (a rye and wheat mixture) only about a tenth, the grain processed by the mills contained only 26 per cent wheat and 23 per cent rye and maslin.¹²

We have negligible evidence for maintenance agreements from the south west and north west (Devon and Cornwall, and north of the Derbyshire Peak), but we can be sure of the predominance of oat cultivation in those regions from mill tolls, tithe receipts, carbonized grain from archaeological excavations and other strong indirect evidence.¹³ The inhabitants must have depended on oat cakes baked on hot stones or iron plates, oatmeal pottage and ale brewed from oat malt, which

¹¹ Dyer, *Standards of Living*, p. 153.

¹² Hampshire Record Office, pipe rolls of the bishopric of Winchester, 1209–1342, from information kindly supplied by Christopher Thornton.

¹³ Hallam, ed., *Agrarian History*, ii, pp. 381, 392–94, 406; G. Beresford, 'Three Deserted Medieval Settlements on Dartmoor: A Report on the Late E. Marie Minter's Excavations', *Medieval Archaeology*, 23 (1979), p. 143.

caused visitors to vomit, according to a sixteenth-century traveller to Devon.¹⁴

In the light of this evidence we must remember that the bulk of our direct information comes from socially and geographically advantaged sections of the population in the thirteenth and early fourteenth century, and that we should therefore be cautious in taking too favourable a view of peasant diet.¹⁵

A further strand in our assessment of the quality of peasant food must relate to its nutritional balance – its proportion of protein for example, and the amount of vitamins and minerals consumed. Abundant evidence shows that peasants ate meat, fish, dairy products, fruit and vegetables; although these appear rather inconsistently in the maintenance contracts, peasants were involved in pastoral husbandry and horticulture, and we would expect at least a small proportion of products from animals and gardens to find their way onto the peasants' tables. Detailed inventories of peasants' possessions and tax assessments sometimes include the bacon and salt meat stored in the house.¹⁶ And excavations of deserted village sites yield the bones of a variety of domestic and (more rarely) wild animals and birds, and sometimes fish.¹⁷

In order to gain insights into the daily quantity of such foods, and the proportion of the diet that these represented, we have to turn to the food and drink given as part of the rewards of wage earners. These employees belong to the lower levels of rural society: they would tend to be cottagers and smallholders, or entirely landless workers, many of them young people who might aspire to hold land later in life, but who in the meantime had to accept a more precarious standard than those with a holding. They had a lower standard of living than better-off peasants, and are representative of a large section of society.

Often we are told the value of the different foods consumed, which alerts us to the very high proportions of cereal foods in the diet. Harvest

¹⁴ For an iron plate, see E.M. Jope and R.I. Thelfall, 'Excavations of a Medieval Settlement at Beere, North Tawton, Devon', *Medieval Archaeology*, 2 (1958), p. 138; on ale, H.S.A. Fox, 'Devon and Cornwall', in E. Miller, ed., *The Agrarian History of England and Wales*, iii, 1348–1500 (Cambridge, 1991), p. 304.

¹⁵ Cf. H.E. Hallam, 'The Worker's Diet', in Hallam, ed., *Agrarian History*, ii, pp. 825–45, which gathers a great deal of data and draws some optimistic conclusions.

¹⁶ P.D.A. Harvey, *Manorial Records of Cuxham, Oxfordshire, circa 1200–1359* (Oxfordshire Record Society, 50, 1976), pp. 153, 712–14.

¹⁷ E.g., M.L. Ryder, 'Animal Remains from Wharram Percy', *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal*, 46 (1974), pp. 42–52; D.J. Rackham, 'Animal Remains', in D. Austin, *The Deserted Medieval Village of Thrislington, County Durham* (Society for Medieval Archaeology Monograph Series, 12, 1989), pp. 146–58.

workers in the north Worcestershire manor of Bromsgrove in 1321–22, for example, received bread and oatmeal which accounted for a half of the food payments by value. Ale accounted for another 28 per cent, leaving meat, fish and dairy produce worth less than a quarter of the total wage in kind.¹⁸ As the latter group of foodstuffs were much more highly priced than the grain, their meagre quantity can be assumed. When the quantities are indeed specified, as on the manors of Norwich Cathedral Priory in Norfolk around 1300, the diet consisted mainly of barley bread and oatmeal pottage, supplemented by herrings, salt cod, cheese and bacon, but with the latter foods in such small quantities that we can calculate for every 2 pounds of barley bread a harvest worker received 2 ounces of cheese, 1 ounce of meat, and $4\frac{1}{2}$ ounces of fish. If we quantify these allowances in terms of calories, we find that 76 per cent were derived from bread and pottage.¹⁹

This heavy bias towards cereal foods of course relates to an unusual time of year, when demesne managers were anxious to attract workers so as to complete the harvest on time, and no doubt expected them to work hard, well fuelled with energy from a relatively full diet. This does not fill us with much optimism in estimating the quality of normal daily food consumption.

A further approach to the estimation of peasant diet comes from reconstructing the income and outgoings of different households, in which the production of grain and other foodstuffs can be calculated within tolerable degrees of accuracy, and we can see how much would be left for the family's consumption after rents, tithes and taxes had been paid, and the needs of the land in terms of seed and animal feed deducted. This leads us to conclude that the upper layer of peasants, the yardlanders, with about thirty acres of arable and access to an appropriate share of common pastures, in midland or southern England, would have been able to provide for a family of five to seven (their families tended to be rather large) with ample quantities of bread, pottage and ale. They would have had no difficulty in supplying themselves with dairy produce regularly and preserved meat; and indeed would have had sufficient surpluses of cash in good years to buy fish, joints of meat, and prepared foods such as puddings and pies from retailers, whether in the village or the local market town. Maintaining an average food intake of c. 2000 calories per day would have presented no difficulties, and their

¹⁸ Worcestershire Cathedral Library, C 545.

¹⁹ C. Dyer, 'Changes in Diet in the Late Middle Ages: The Case of Harvest Workers', *Everyday Life in Medieval England* (London, 1994), pp. 77–99.

diet would have been quite varied and palatable.²⁰ On the other hand, the halfyardlanders with about fifteen acres would have had difficulties in supplying a family of five with ale or meat in any quantity regularly, and smallholders, with insufficient land to feed their families, would have needed to buy grain to supplement their own produce. Given the low rates of pay for unskilled workers around 1300, and the shortage of paid work outside the peak seasons, it is hard to conceive of the smallholders, who accounted for a substantial minority of the rural population, as eating much more than basic rations of cheap cereals, with very small quantities and infrequent supplies of ale, meat and dairy produce.

Peasant eating fluctuated much more than that of the more privileged groups in medieval society. Within each year there would be periods of relative abundance during and after the harvest and slaughter of animals – from August to December. Poorer peasants observed Lent out of necessity as well as piety – deprivation of meat imposed no great hardship on people who ate meat irregularly in any case. But the hardest time would have been in the early summer, as provisions began to run out, grain prices rose, and the new year's crops were not yet ready to harvest. The provision in village by-laws that the poor could pick green peas and beans from the ends of strips in the fields would have been a valuable means of keeping families going at this difficult time.²¹

In addition to the seasonal cycle, the annual harvest fluctuations made a large difference to the well-being of all groups, depriving the better-off of their surplus (and incidentally making it difficult to employ other poorer neighbours, or to give much in charity) and threatening the health of the smallholders who depended on the market for their staple diet.

A longer-term cyclical fluctuation again affected all peasant households – the changes in the fortunes of the household as the parents aged and children matured. Tenants of middling holdings must have encountered special hardship if they had many children who reached maturity, and would have sought positions for them in households which needed servants and could afford to feed them. We have seen that old age posed no great threat to tenants who could trade off their land against a pension, but not all old people had enough acres to negotiate successfully for an adequate allowance. In any case not all contracts were kept; they were

²⁰ Dyer, *Standards of Living*, pp. 110–18; C. Dyer, 'Were Peasants Self-Sufficient? English Villagers and the Market, 900–1350', in E. Mornet, ed., *Campagnes médiévales: l'homme et son espace* (Paris, 1995), pp. 660–62.

²¹ W.O. Ault, *Open-Field Farming in Medieval England: A Study of Village By-Laws* (London, 1972), pp. 38–40.

formally recorded because the retiring peasant suspected that the incoming tenant might not keep his or her word, and occasionally disputes appear in the court records or are mentioned in contemporary literature. At any time in any peasant community a sizeable minority of households were suffering from some life-cycle disadvantage, whether because of old age or the premature death of an adult family member. Widows are conventionally regarded as a major deprived group, but a widower would also have encountered serious difficulties in managing the holding without his wife's contribution of labour and skills.

All that this evidence for fluctuations and variations in the food consumption of peasants tells us is that some sections of rural society were poorer and more vulnerable than others. But it does not prove that they actually starved.

That they did can be demonstrated simply enough. In the Great Famine of 1315–18 between 10 and 15 per cent of the population died on the manors where there is good evidence for the size of the male population. There were in addition occasional bouts of high mortality in other bad harvest years in the same period – in 1293–95, 1310–12 and 1321–22 for example – depending on the locality.²² As the population of England at this time stood in the region of six million, the Great Famine alone must have claimed at least 600,000 lives, and if we add the toll from lesser episodes the total figure must amount to near a million people, who died at times of low grain yields and consequently high food prices between 1290 and 1325.

Now there are some important arguments that can be used to question and qualify the simple conclusion that the peasants did starve in the worst years of the decades around 1300, and this resulted in almost a million deaths. I will deal with them in turn under six headings.

First, the theory that the peasantry were poised on a knife edge of subsistence at this time, which was advanced by Professor Postan and Dr Titow in the 1960s, has to some extent been discredited. They counted the heriots (death duties) paid by tenants on the estates of the bishopric of Winchester, and argued that every time wheat prices rose above 7s. per quarter, there was an accompanying rise in the death rate. They made the mistake of presuming that every heriot represented a death,

²² L. Poos, 'The Rural Population of Essex in the Later Middle Ages', *Economic History Review*, 38 (1985), pp. 515–30; Z. Razi, *Life, Marriage and Death in a Medieval Parish: Economy, Society and Demography in Halesowen, 1270–1400* (Cambridge, 1980), pp. 38–45; R.M. Smith, 'Demographic Developments in Rural England, 1300–48: A Survey', in B.M.S. Campbell, ed., *Before the Black Death: Studies in the 'Crisis' of the Early Fourteenth Century* (Manchester, 1991), pp. 53–56.

but it is much more likely that on the Winchester manors, as elsewhere, heriots were paid when a tenant surrendered a holding, and that high prices led to increased activity in the land market. Poorer people in considerable numbers sold lands in hard times, demonstrating a degree of social hardship, but not necessarily mortality.²³ Granted that episodes of high mortality were not occurring as frequently as Postan thought, we are still left with a number of bad years in addition to the Great Famine, which by no means removes the idea that starvation was part of the medieval English peasants' experience. The notion that these years were just an accident of climate will not provide an adequate explanation. As modern experience shows, disasters happen everywhere, but floods or droughts in poverty-stricken societies like those of Bangladesh or Ethiopia cause much more suffering than an earthquake in California or inundations in the Netherlands. The vulnerability of the English peasantry to episodes of bad weather tells us something about the peasants as well as about the climate.

Secondly, another line of argument, associated with the Italian demographer Livi-Bacci, would emphasize that people do not die in large numbers from the effects of hunger but from disease, and that in periods such as the fifteenth century there was no connection between nutritional status and 'crisis mortality'.²⁴ A number of the episodes of high death rates in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries were no doubt the result of epidemic diseases, because higher than average mortality is reported among the parish clergy and gentry who cannot have been suffering from hunger.²⁵ But this still does not remove the association between hunger and ill-health, as the coincidence between high grain prices and high mortality is clearly established in a number of local studies. We must presume that famine-related diseases such as typhus spread from the hungry poor to their better-nourished neighbours.

A third argument would be to suggest that we have miscalculated the resources of the peasant population. For example, perhaps we are too

²³ M. M. Postan and J. Z. Titow, 'Heriots and Prices on Winchester Manors', in M. M. Postan, *Essays on Medieval Agriculture and General Problems of the Medieval Economy* (Cambridge, 1973), pp. 107–49; B.M.S. Campbell, 'Population Pressure, Inheritance and the Land Market in a Fourteenth-Century Peasant Community', in R.M. Smith, ed., *Land, Kinship and Lifecycle* (Cambridge, 1984), pp. 87–134; B.F. Harvey, 'Introduction: The "Crisis" of the Early Fourteenth Century', in Campbell, ed., *Before the Black Death*, pp. 7–9.

²⁴ M. Livi-Bacci, *Population and Nutrition: An Essay on European Demographic History* (Cambridge, 1991).

²⁵ R.J. Rowberry, 'Late Medieval Demography: A Study of Mortality among the Beneficed Clergy in Western England' (unpublished BA dissertation, University of Birmingham, 1974), pp. 9–15.

fixated on the supply of grain from the fields, and do not take sufficient account of the peasants' undocumented gardens, or the food for free that could be found in woods and wastes – wild fruits, small game and other supplements. Alternatively, the 'cottage economy' of the smallholders depended not just on the meagre wages of the head of the household, but also on the whole family's earnings from employment, and from activities such as retail trade, or from the sale of such commodities as rushes gathered from the commons or peat dug in the local turbary. To some extent these items in the peasant economy are recorded and can be quantified. It must be emphasized initially that coastal villages had ready access to seafish, which gave their inhabitants advantages over inland peasants in their ability to consume cheap animal protein. But for the majority of inland peasants the story looks less optimistic. There are tithe records for garden produce, and the size of garden plots is recorded in both documents and the archaeological remains of deserted village sites. They do not suggest that gardens were either large or very productive.²⁶

Peasants probably ate more vegetables and fruits than the aristocracy, but this was not a culture which put much value on the fresh produce which we regard as so important for a healthy diet, and the upper classes seem to have survived on remarkably low levels of vitamin C.²⁷ Nor would the bone remains from village sites support the notion that peasants consumed much game. We should not ignore the ecological balance in the lowland districts where most people lived; outside the woodlands, uplands and wetlands, the arable acreage was so extensive that only a fifth or less of the land was uncultivated, leaving a limited range of wild flora and fauna either for dietary supplements or sources of revenue. We cannot escape from the miserable wage rates of the period, which point to an abundance of labour priced at a very low level because of the lack of employment opportunities.²⁸ The petty trading and manufacturing which helped many cottagers was very vulnerable to economic fluctuations – in periods of food shortage the market was depressed. As customers who normally drank ale saved their money to buy food, for example, the ale wives were deprived of a market for their products.

Fourthly, another apparent assurance of an underlying prosperity among the peasants might be sought in the commercial growth of the thirteenth

²⁶ C. Dyer, 'Gardens and Orchards in Medieval England', in Dyer, *Everyday Life*, pp. 116–21, 128–30.

²⁷ B. F. Harvey, *Living and Dying in England, 1100–1540: The Monastic Experience* (Oxford, 1993), pp. 60–61, 63.

²⁸ Farmer, 'Prices and Wages', pp. 760–79.

century. Surely the proliferation of local markets and the rise in the urban population point to a wealthy society? Many craftsmen and traders were gaining a living from supplying the peasants with their clothing, leather goods, housing, pots and pans, agricultural tools and so on.²⁹ The problem here is that there has never been any doubt about the spending power of the many thousands of households of the upper and middling sections of the peasantry, but they were not the direct victims of the hungry years. The commercialization of the period should not be underestimated, because it represented a fundamental social and economic shift in the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries.³⁰ But it did not always aid the plight of the rural poor. Short-term employment opportunities and the expansion of retail trade must have played a part in fuelling population growth by tempting young people who lacked stable resources to marry and set up a new household in a cottage, but of course these were precisely the people who suffered from the high prices in hard years. They specifically were tempted to borrow money and food, and then found that they could not repay.³¹ They benefited from the market but then found that it offered no more than an illusion of opportunity. And cottagers are the people who appear fully in our records – there was also a shadowy, semi-documented cohort of servants, subtenants and casual workers who sometimes owed small payments of cash or labour to lords, or who when they died were expected to yield up pathetic heriots of old and nearly worthless clothing, but whose precise numbers remain uncertain. The urban population contained a proportion of traders and artisans prospering from the growth in demand, but also a fringe of migrants driven in from the countryside, who lived precariously from occasional earnings and marginal activities.

A fifth interpretation that has emerged from recent research into regional farming systems emphasized the productivity that could be gained from intensive exploitation of the fields.³² Agrarian historians have

²⁹ R.H. Hilton, *The English Peasantry in the Later Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1975), pp. 76–94.

³⁰ R.H. Britnell, *The Commercialisation of English Society, 1000–1500* (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 79–151; N. Mayhew, ‘Modelling Medieval Monetisation’, in R.H. Britnell and B.M.S. Campbell, eds, *A Commercialising Economy, England, 1086 – c. 1300* (Manchester, 1995), pp. 68–73.

³¹ On the problem of indebtedness, see Razi, *Life, Marriage, and Death*, pp. 37, 81–82; on some of the traps of commercialization, see R.H. Britnell, ‘Commercialisation and Economic Development in England, 1000–1300’, in Britnell and Campbell, eds, *A Commercialising Economy*, pp. 19–23.

³² B.M.S. Campbell, ‘Land, Labour, Livestock, and Productivity Trends in English Seigniorial Agriculture, 1208–1450’, in B.M.S. Campbell and M. Overton, *Land, Labour and Livestock: Historical Studies in European Agricultural Productivity* (Manchester, 1991), pp. 144–82.

presumed that the mediocre yields of the midlands and the south – between three and four times the seed planted – were universal, and that consequently production was inadequate to meet the needs of society. However, in densely populated parts of Norfolk, the use of abundant inputs of labour allowed much higher grain yields per acre. But this does not mean that the inhabitants of this region escaped from hunger, because the very cheapness of labour which allowed intensive cultivation methods gave the workers a reduced diet.³³ The same researcher who discovered the Norfolk farming system has now turned his attention to the rest of the country, and has to conclude that in normal years the subsistence requirements of the population were barely matched by total agricultural production, which must imply that bad harvests spelt danger for the poor.³⁴

Finally, there is the question of social institutions. Surely in this closely regulated, responsible and caring society, a variety of mechanisms would prevent mass impoverishment and starvation? Perhaps the most important of these institutions were the social customs and practices surrounding the decision to marry.³⁵ Although the church maintained the legality of vows exchanged between couples as constituting valid contracts, in popular custom marriages still depended on agreements between families, with proper provision of land and goods to give the new household a sound basis. If we look at the lists of tenants and holdings in surveys of manors in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, with their remarkably stable lists of customary tenements, we cannot imagine that peasants were marrying casually or hastily. There is, however, some evidence that during the thirteenth century customary restraints on marriage may have been relaxed. We find peasant fathers taking advantage of the land market, or the assarting of new land, to endow children with smallholdings who would not ordinarily have inherited any land, enabling them to form new households.³⁶ As we have seen, the opening up of a more commercial society may have led these beneficent fathers to believe that a living could be made without a substantial land holding.

If the restraints on population growth were to some extent pushed

³³ I owe this observation to Mark Overton.

³⁴ B.M.S. Campbell, J.A. Galloway, D. Keene and M. Murphy, *A Medieval Capital and its Grain Supply: Agrarian Production and Distribution in the London Region, c. 1300*, Historical Geography Research Series, 30 (1993), pp. 37–45.

³⁵ E. Clark, 'The Decision to Marry in Thirteenth- and Early Fourteenth-Century Norfolk', *Mediaeval Studies*, 49 (1987), pp. 496–516.

³⁶ Z. Razi, 'The Myth of the Immutable English Family', *Past and Present*, 140 (1993), pp. 7–10.

aside by new economic developments in the period, the casualties would surely have found a safety-net in the various charitable organizations? We are aware of a wide range of methods by which charity was distributed – church institutions provided relief for the poor, from the almonries of great monasteries to the distributions made by the incumbent and the laity of the parish church.³⁷ Families looked after their own members, for example, by the type of maintenance agreement already mentioned, or by providing non-inheriting children with parcels of land or allowances of grain. Villagers must have aided their poor neighbours with free meals or offers of employment. The village community in its more formal guise allowed gleaning and pea-picking to the genuine poor – the others had to earn their living in the harvest.

But doubts must surround the effectiveness of these measures, especially when they were tested by an extremely bad harvest. Many villages, and families, no matter how well disposed towards their neighbours, especially in many places which lacked a stratum of wealthy tenants, would simply not have enough spare capacity to feed the many poor. In addition we should not idealize excessively the medieval sense of responsibility. After all, the bulk of our information about the remedies for poverty during the Great Famine and other years of hardship relates to self-help, as the less well-off borrowed money and food or sold their land in order to pay debts. And in desperation many people turned to crime, or at least the statistics reveal a sudden rise in accusations.³⁸

To complete the discussion of the period *c.* 1290–1325, we cannot escape the conclusion that large numbers of English peasants really did starve in the worst years. Normal peasant eating of the period put a heavy emphasis on an imbalanced intake of cereals, and the vulnerability of the poorer sections of the community was increased by their dependence on the purchase of grain. The populations of the mainly oat-growing counties were in danger from bad harvests as no adequate cheaper substitute was available to them. The mortality and the suffering of those whose lives were disrupted by these years cannot be attributed simply to an accident of bad weather. We do not need to accept Postan's thesis of overpopulation and the ecological damage to the land to recognize that this was a period of crisis. But the crisis had as much to do with the overheating of the market and the various dislocations this caused as with the Malthusian excess of people.

³⁷ Dyer, *Standards of Living*, pp. 234–57.

³⁸ B. Hanawalt, 'Economic Influence on the Pattern of Crime in England, 1300–1348', *American Journal of Legal History*, 18 (1974), pp. 281–97.

Peasant eating in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries went through a real transformation. All of the causes of earlier hardship were ameliorated as the population declined. The amount of land cultivated by each family increased. The number of smallholders was reduced as they found it possible to acquire more acres. Those who remained as wage labourers found themselves in a superior bargaining position; the tenants of larger holdings sought to employ them, and the demand for craft workers increased with the growth of rural cloth-making. In the late thirteenth century, a labourer would have needed to work for forty-eight days to pay for a quarter (eight bushels) of wheat. In fact such a worker would not have aspired to buy so expensive a commodity as wheat. In the fifteenth century a comparable unskilled worker could acquire the cash to buy a quarter of wheat in fifteen days' employment, and many of them could have afforded to eat wheat bread, and much else besides.

The direct evidence of food allowances to workers shows a steady increase in the late fourteenth century in the quantities of ale and meat given to workers. Norfolk harvesters in the early fifteenth century were allowed for every two pounds of bread, one pound of meat and six pints of ale.³⁹ All over the country the quality of foodstuffs given to harvest workers improved – wheat bread was baked instead of that made from barley and rye. Fresh meat, including beef, was provided instead of bacon. In districts with a cider-drinking tradition such as Sussex, ale was preferred. And fresh fish was substituted for dried cod and salt herrings. So much meat was provided for workers that cheese diminished in importance in the diet. Always we must remember that harvest workers were especially privileged, and that everyday production and consumption of preserved fish, bacon and dairy products continued at a high level.

The trends in food consumption are confirmed by the comments of contemporaries, who complained in particular that servants and labourers could demand wheat, white bread, good ale (instead of the second-best brew, or water), and hot dishes of fresh meat, and despised cabbages.⁴⁰ The prosecutions under the Statute of Labourers in the late fourteenth century show ploughmen refusing to accept employment without receiving fresh meat (rather than salted) and wheat bread.⁴¹

Developments in the food trades suggest a shifting demand. Butchers increased in numbers and prominence in both towns and country. Land

³⁹ Dyer, 'Changes in Diet', pp. 83–85.

⁴⁰ E.g., G. Kane and E. Talbot Donaldson, eds, *Piers Plowman: The B Version* (London, 1975), passus 6, lines 303–11.

⁴¹ S.A.C. Penn and C. Dyer, 'Wages and Earnings in Late Medieval England: Evidence from the Enforcement of the Labour Laws', in Dyer, *Everyday Life*, p. 185.

everywhere was converted from arable to pasture in response to the market for meat – a more important and valuable commodity than the wool that has received most historical attention. In the villages the ale house became a more permanent institution, where ale was sold regularly, often alongside prepared foodstuffs, which tended to replace the intermittent and short-term ale selling of the pre-plague era.⁴² This must reflect a more sustained demand, perhaps from better-off households who bought ale rather than brewing it themselves, and above all from groups of poorer people who had previously been unable to afford to drink ale regularly. Finally, the records of small-town courts contain references in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries to the enforcement of the assize of bread, which was bought by customers from the surrounding villages as well as the townspeople themselves. Indeed we know that urban bakers carried their wares into the countryside for sale.⁴³ The striking feature of the records is that even in a district not previously noted for its wheat consumption, such as Norfolk, the bakers were producing not just wheat bread, but that made from the finest white flour, the wastel loaf.⁴⁴

We can detect in all these changes a cultural as well as a material dimension. A feature of the new peasant diet was a tendency to emulate the consumption and style of the aristocracy. The model provided by the upper class must have been familiar to the peasantry. The sons and daughters of peasants were recruited into service in the households of the local gentry and clergy. Lords and ladies (like Alice de Bryene of Acton in Suffolk) would invite their tenants to special meals, often during the Christmas season.⁴⁵ When village fraternities held their annual feast they presumably hired a cook experienced in preparing meals for the gentry.⁴⁶

We should therefore not be surprised to find that, when peasants and rural workers gained the opportunity to improve their diet, they aped the standards of their lords. In particular they aspired to ample dishes

⁴² P. Clark, *The English Ale-House: A Social History, 1200–1830* (London, 1983), pp. 20–38.

⁴³ E.g. PRO, SC2 210/71 (court roll of Pershore, Worcestershire, which shows 'cokett', 'treat' and 'wastell' loaves being sold in 1374); Hereford and Worcester County Record Office, 009:1 B.A. 2636/169 92372 (in 1474 bakers from Bewdley and Worcester sold bread at Hartlebury, Worcestershire).

⁴⁴ Norfolk Record Office, MCR/B/26 (wastels were sold in the market of Hingham, 1420, 1461).

⁴⁵ M.K. Dale and V.B. Redstone, eds, *The Household Book of Dame Alice de Bryene* (Suffolk Institute of Archaeology and Natural History, 1931), p. 28. See below, Chapter 9.

⁴⁶ A.G. Rosser, 'Going to the Fraternity Feast: Commensality and Social Relations in Late Medieval England', *Journal of British Studies*, 33 (1994), pp. 430–46.

of meat and fish, and doubtless hoped to drink the daily gallon of ale regarded as standard in aristocratic household budgeting. They aimed also to be able to eat fine white wheat bread.⁴⁷ They may also have shared the aristocratic disdain for fresh vegetables – contemporary writers thought that garlic, onions and leeks were typical poverty foods, and this prejudice may have influenced peasant tastes. There is certainly no evidence of expanding peasant horticulture in the post-Black Death period, rather the opposite as gardens and orchards were abandoned because of the difficulty of finding labour to work them. They would not have been able to afford much wine or spices, though the presence of ‘spicers’ in small towns and market villages might hint at a more general market for imported condiments, at least for special occasions.⁴⁸ But then the lesser gentry and parish clergy – the most immediate role models for the improved peasant diet – did not use large quantities of these expensive imports either.

There are indications also that the prevalence of boiling as a means of food preparation was supplemented by more roasting and frying in the style of the wealthy in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.⁴⁹ Not only were the foodstuffs and cooking of the aristocracy imitated, but also their table manners, judging from the table cloths, towels, ewers and basins listed in the inventories of peasant households. Peasant tableware – decorated jugs from the late thirteenth century, attractively glazed drinking cups by the fifteenth – provide further evidence for peasant meals as occasions for a little display and refinement.⁵⁰

We should note, however, the negative side of this emulation of the aristocracy because, although peasants were acquiring patterns of eating which added to the variety and attractiveness of meals, they were also adopting a diet unlikely in the opinion of modern nutritionists to lead to good health – a higher intake of refined bread, fatty meat and alcohol – while at the same time reducing the amount of fruit and vegetables, cannot be regarded as an improvement according to modern fashion.⁵¹ But they undoubtedly felt happier with their new style of eating, and can we be certain that they were wrong?

⁴⁷ On emulation in diet, see S. Mennell, *All Manners of Food: Eating and Taste in England and France from the Middle Ages to the Present* (Oxford, 1985), pp. 54–61.

⁴⁸ For example, at Fishlake in Yorkshire: *Rotulorum collectorum subsidii* (poll-tax of 1379), *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal*, 6 (1879–80), p. 15.

⁴⁹ M. McCarthy and C.M. Brooks, *Medieval Pottery in Britain, AD 900–1600* (Leicester, 1988), pp. 107–8.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 110–14.

⁵¹ Harvey, *Living and Dying*, pp. 34–71.

In fact the life expectation of the peasantry seems to have increased at this time, and one dimension of that development lay in the virtual disappearance of life-threatening subsistence crises.⁵² After a concentration of bad years between the Black Death and 1375, grain prices became relatively low and stable. Some shortfalls in harvests returned in the early fifteenth century and culminated in a run of very poor crops in the late 1430s. After that there was little evidence of serious food shortage until the early sixteenth century. We cannot doubt that the famine of the 1430s caused much disruption, especially in the north, and that it was a turning-point for the economies of some magnates' estates, and of some towns. But, except in East Anglia, where an epidemic coincided with the famine, there is little evidence for excess mortality.⁵³ The general increase in wheat eating presumably meant that in hard times the cheaper cereals and pulses, often used in this period as animal feed, could be consumed by humans once more. There may even have been accumulated stocks of corn hanging over from one year to the next, acting as a cushion against hunger.

In addition, for those who did suffer deprivation, the safety-net of charity would have been growing in effectiveness. Parish-based support for the poor, with almshouses, and collection of money on the basis of rates or other local levies, managed by churchwardens, constables and perhaps with contributions from the parish fraternities, had been developing from the mid fourteenth century, and supplemented or even replaced the more informal machinery of personal and family charity of earlier generations.⁵⁴

If my analysis of eating and food shortage among the medieval peasants is right, and the historians of the early modern period are correct in their upbeat view of food crises in the succeeding centuries, an important turning-point in history occurred during the fourteenth century. Perhaps the year 1375, which ushered in an era of cheap and plentiful food, is the key date. After then the peasants no longer starved, and the era of hunger-driven mortality had ended. This takes us beyond the history of food, because it implies that English people could spend more on non-

⁵² Dyer, *Standards of Living*, pp. 271–72.

⁵³ A. Pollard, 'The North-Eastern Economy and the Agrarian Crisis of 1438–1440', *Northern History*, 25 (1989), pp. 88–105; R.S. Gottfried, *Epidemic Disease in Fifteenth-Century England* (Leicester, 1978), pp. 96–97.

⁵⁴ M.K. McIntosh, 'Local Changes and Community Control in England, 1465–1500', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 9 (1988), pp. 219–42; E. Clark, 'Social Welfare and Mutual Aid in the Medieval Countryside', *Journal of British Studies*, 33 (1994), pp. 381–406.

food items than ever before, and we can trace to this period the growth of steady demand from a mass market for such goods as woollen cloth.⁵⁵ And, furthermore, we can observe a divergence between the history of England and that of mainland Europe. For generations after Sir John Fortescue compared the well-nourished and independent-minded English population with their miserable French counterparts, the continental peasants still occasionally went hungry.

⁵⁵ The proportion of income spent on food in pre-industrial societies is discussed in C. Shammas, 'Food Expenditure and Economic Well-Being in Early Modern England', *Journal of Economic History*, 43 (1983), pp. 89–100.

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Cannibalism as an Aspect of Famine in Two English Chronicles

Julia Marvin

From 1315 to 1318 England – and much of Europe – suffered three rainy years and six ruined harvests in a row. By 1316 famine had begun. Seed-corn rotted in the damp, mass malnutrition led to death from disease, and the desperate resorted to crime, all in time of war. A year or two after the rains stopped and the harvests began to improve, England was visited with the murrain, fatal epidemics among such livestock as had survived the famine. In some places, prosperity did not return until well into the 1320s; in others, the famine seems to have marked the beginning of the century's economic decline.¹ Some manorial records indicate mortality of 10 per cent or more over the course of the famine, and the rate may have been higher still in the towns: fourteenth- and fifteenth-century English chronicles describe the dearth with language as potent as that of the Black Death of 1348.²

Medieval accounts of the famine address a set of common themes, including the rains that provoked the crisis, high prices, scarcity of goods, mass hunger, widespread mortality, murrain, corpses too numerous to bury, strange diet and the explicit attribution of the disaster to the wrath of God.³ These topics are by no means unique to 1316; many of them can be found in Josephus' first-century *Jewish War*,⁴ and in reports of

¹ Ian Kershaw, 'The Great Famine and Agrarian Crisis in England, 1315–1322', *Past and Present*, 59 (1973), p. 50.

² Michael M. Postan and Jan Z. Titow, 'Heriots and Prices on Winchester Manors', *Economic History Review*, 2nd series, 11 (1958), p. 407, table 1, graphs 1, 2; Kershaw, 'The Great Famine', p. 11.

³ See the Appendix for a list of chronicles consulted, on which these observations are based.

⁴ Josephus' description of mass starvation in the besieged city of Jerusalem circulated through Eusebius and then (via Eusebius) the *Golden Legend*. A version of the story appears in the late fourteenth-century Middle English poem *The Siege of Jerusalem*. Josephus, *The Jewish War, Books IV–VII*, ed. and trans. H. St J. Thackeray (London and Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1928), v. 424–25; vi. 193–213; Eusebius, *The Ecclesiastical History*, ed. and trans. Kiropp Lake, i (London and New York, 1926), 3.5.5–3.6.28; Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, trans. William Granger Ryan (Princeton, New Jersey, 1993), c. 67 (on

other medieval famines, such as that of 1258 in the chronicle of Bury St Edmunds:

Penuria omnium bonorum sequitur precedentis anni inundacionem; nam quartarium frumenti, quod raro inueniebatur, ad xv. solidos et eciam usque xx. solidos uendebatur. Vnde tanta fames orta est ut pauperes carnem equinam, cortices arborum, uel quod deterius est, comedenter; innumerabiles fame defecerunt.

(There was a great shortage of everything because of the floods of the previous year, and corn, which was very scarce, cost from 15s. to as much as 20s. a quarter. Famine resulted so that the poor had to eat horsemeat, the bark of trees and even more unpleasant things. Many died of hunger.)⁵

Only a few chronicles of the famine of 1316 refer to that strangest of strange diet, cannibalism, but their stories are striking, and some modern readers have given them credence.⁶ In this essay I examine two such accounts, the fourteenth-century *Vita Edwardi Secundi* and the fifteenth-century annals of Bermondsey, in order to analyse the immediate function of cannibalism in their representation of famine, and to consider what these particular episodes demonstrate about their authors' methods of constructing history.

One of the most nearly contemporary accounts of the famine, the anonymous *Vita Edwardi Secundi*, dates from 1325 or 1326 and appears to be an entirely original work, according to its modern editor, Noël Denholm-Young.⁷ The chronicle as a whole offers a detailed account of the reign of Edward II, with careful attention to the English campaigns

continued

St James the Apostle), i, pp. 275–76; *The Siege of Jerusalem*, ed. E. Kölbing and M. Day, EETS, original series, 188 (London, 1932), lines 1063–96.

⁵ *Chronicle of Bury St Edmunds, 1212–1301*, ed. and trans. Antonia Gransden (London, 1964), p. 22.

⁶ Henry Lucas, for example, asserts in the first major article on the famine that cannibalism 'certainly was common:', 'The Great European Famine of 1315, 1316 and 1317', *Speculum*, 5 (1930), p. 355. Kershaw more cautiously suggests that reports 'may have been exaggerated but they testify to the stark horror . . . impressed upon the memories of contemporaries', Kershaw, 'The Great Famine', pp. 9–10. William Chester Jordan's magisterial book, *The Great Famine: Northern Europe in the Early Fourteenth Century* (Princeton, New Jersey, 1996), appeared after this essay was written. See pp. 148–50 for his consideration of accounts of cannibalism.

⁷ He believes that the surviving version lacks a final revision: the text ends with 1325, expressing hopes that would be crushed by the events of 1327, when Edward II was deposed and murdered, *Vita Edwardi Secundi*, ed. and trans. Noël Denholm-Young (London, 1957), pp. xiv, xvii–xviii.

in Scotland, Wales and Ireland, baronial politics and the affairs of the church. It is opinionated and moralistic – the author never hesitates to point out the lessons to be learned from the bad ends of rebels – and it speculates freely about the future, so freely that Denholm-Young considers the chronicler ‘outspoken in a degree that would be madness in any rising man’ and concludes that he must have retired from public life before writing the *Vita*.⁸

The chronicle’s account of the famine extends across three annals: that for 1315, when the rains that caused the dearth began; that for 1316, when government price controls failed and widespread hunger set in; and that for 1318, when the famine abated. Throughout, the text is in a vivid historical present. The writer begins,

Per alia quedam signa appareat manus Dei contra nos extenta. Nam anno preterito tanta fuit habundantia pluiae quod uix licuit hominibus frumenta colligere uel horreo salua recondere. Anno uero presenti deterius euenit. Nam inundatio pluuiarum omne fere semen consumpsit, in tantum ut uaticinium Ysaye iam uidetur expletum esse; ait enim decem iugera uinearum faciunt lagunculam unam, et triginta modii sementis faciunt modios tres . . . Oues autem communiter perierunt et alia animalia subita peste ceciderunt. Valde autem nobis timendum est ne, si Dominus post hec flagella incorrigibiles nos inueniat, homines et pecora simul disperdat; et constanter credo quod, nisi intercederet Anglicana religio, dispersi fuissemus elapso tempore multo.

(By certain other portents the hand of God appears to be raised against us. For in the past year there was such plentiful rain that men could scarcely harvest the corn or bring it safely to the barn. In the present year worse has happened. For the floods of rain have rotted almost all the seed, so that the prophecy of Isaiah might seem now to be fulfilled; for he says that ‘ten acres of vineyard shall yield one little measure and thirty bushels of seed shall yield three bushels’. . . Sheep generally died and other animals were killed by a sudden plague. It is greatly to be feared that if the Lord finds us incorrigible after these visitations, he will destroy at once both men and beasts; and I firmly believe that unless the English church had interceded for us, we should have perished long ago.)⁹

The chronicler alludes specifically to Isaiah and, appropriately, considering the endless rain and widespread mortality, uses the language of that

⁸ Ibid., p. xix.

⁹ Ibid., p. 64.

great biblical catastrophe, the Flood.¹⁰ Though he speaks of ‘the present year’, his past-tense reference to the murrain shows that he was writing or at least revising his text after the fact: manorial records indicate that the murrain in most places began later than 1315 and reached its height in late 1316 and 1317.¹¹ The chronicler cannot be simply recording the events as they happen. Instead, he is taking the authorial stance of an immediate eyewitness, using his foreknowledge to indicate the full scale of the disaster at the outset and to emphasize its likeness to the Flood, another tribulation brought on by human wickedness and alleviated through God’s grace and the efforts of the virtuous.

The annal for the following year, 1316, also sounds at first as if it is written in mid crisis: the beginning of the dearth is past tense, England’s desperate situation present tense and the desired resolution future tense. Nevertheless, even at the start of the passage, the writer is quick to provide reassurance, describing the failure of the government’s attempt to regulate prices but concluding, ‘Nam licet raritas annonam facit cariorem, habundantia subsequens reddit meliorem’ (for although scarcity of corn raises the price, subsequent plenty will improve the situation).¹² He then claims that the famine is the worst in a century, that many thousands have died of hunger and pestilence, and that

A quibusdam etiam audiui relatum, quod in partibus Northumbrorum canes et equi et alia immunda sumebantur ad esum. Hii enim propter frequentes incursus Scotorum maiori tedio laborabant, quos maledicti Scotti suis uictualibus cotidie spoliabant.

(I have even heard it said by some, that in Northumbria dogs and horses and other unclean things were eaten. For there, on account of the frequent raids of the Scots, work is more irksome, as the accursed Scots despoil the people daily of their food.)¹³

¹⁰ Cf. Isaiah 5:10: ‘decem enim iuga vinerarum facient lagunculam unam et triginta modii sementia facient modios tres’ (translated in text), and Genesis 7:18, 21 and 23: ‘Vehementur inundaverunt [aqua]e et omnia repleverunt in superficie terra . . . consumptaque est omnis caro . . . et delevit omnem substantiam quae erat super terram ab homine usque ad pecus’ (for they [the waters] overflowed exceedingly: and filled all on the face of the earth . . . and all flesh was destroyed . . . and he destroyed all the substance that was upon the earth, from man even to beast). All Latin quotations from the Bible come from *Biblia sacra iuxta vulgatam versionem* (Stuttgart, 1975) and all translations from the Bible from *The Holy Bible*, Douay version (New York, n.d.).

¹¹ Kershaw uses records of wool exports and manorial sales of livestock to assess the timing and extent of the murrain, ‘The Great Famine’, pp. 20–29.

¹² *Vita*, p. 69.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 69–70.

The chronicler is cautious here, careful to balance the story with the warning that he has only heard of these distant events from others, and he even offers an explanation of the circumstances that might have driven the Northerners to such an extreme. After bemoaning England's destitution, complaining of the wickedness of the inhabitants of the land and imploring God's mercy in a passage that is a collage of biblical quotations, he makes another sudden, cheerful turn, bolstered by both astrology and the Psalms:

Saturnus enim securus et frigidus asperitates procreat inutiles seminibus; triennio iam regnans cursum consummauit, et sibi mitis Jupiter ordine succedit. Porro Joue regnante cessabunt pluuias unde, ualles habundabunt frumento et campi replebuntur ubertate; etenim Dominus dabit benignitatem, et terra nostra debit fructum suum.

(For Saturn, cold and heedless, brings rough weather that is useless to the seed; in the ascendant now for three years he has completed his course, and mild Jupiter duly succeeds him. Under Jupiter these floods of rain will cease, the valleys will grow rich in corn, and the fields be filled with abundance. For the Lord shall give that which is good and our land shall yield her increase.)¹⁴

Again, such prophetic serenity in the face of disaster does not speak for true contemporaneity, but it prepares the way for the *Vita*'s entry for 1318, the year the famine abated. The chronicler takes the end of the famine as one of a series of signs that God's favour is returning to England:

[Cessauit] sterilitas illa que diu nos afflxit, et habundantia omni[um] bonorum terram Anglorum multipliciter foecundauit. Modius tritici, qui anno preterito pro xl. denariis uendebatur, hodie pro sex denariis emptori libenter offertur. Sic olim tamdiu obsessa Samaria, ut mater filii carnibus uesceretur pro penuria uictualium, recuperauit diuina gratia. Nam caput asini, quod octoginta aureis pridie uendebatur, omnibus inmundum in crastino reputatum erat, et modius simile pro statere uno uenundatus, sicut predixerat uir Dei Heliseus.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 70 and nn. 1–3. The preceding passage runs, 'Terra fructifera uertitur in salsuginem; aeris intemperies deuorat pinguedinem; seritur frumentum et procreatur lollium. Eueniunt autem omnia a malitia habitantium in ea. Parce, Domine, parce populo tuo. Subsannant et derident nos qui sunt in circuitu nostro' (Fruitful land is turned into a salt-marsh; the inclemency of the weather destroys the fatness of the land; corn is sown and tares are brought forth. All this comes from the wickedness of the inhabitants. Spare, O Lord, spare thy people! For we are a scorn and a derision to them who are round about us). The writer quotes Vulgate Psalm 106:34 (also recalling Jeremiah 12:4 and 13), as well as Joel 2:17 and Vulgate Psalm 43:14, and in the following passage he quotes Vulgate Psalm 64:12 and 14 and Vulgate Psalm 84:13. The text's shifts in tone could also be said to reflect psalm structure.

(The dearth that had so long plagued us ceased, and England became fruitful with a manifold abundance of good things. A measure of wheat, which the year before was sold for forty pence, was now freely offered to the buyer for sixpence. Thus it once happened when Samaria was besieged for so long that for lack of food a mother fed upon the flesh of her son, that the land recovered through divine grace. For an ass's head, which had one day sold for eighty pieces of gold, was on the morrow held unclean by all, and a measure of fine flour was sold for a shekel, according to the word of the man of God Elisha.)¹⁵

The story cited is that of the siege of Samaria in II Kings, 6 and 7. Though the writer recalls it as much for its happy ending as for its desperation, it is one of the more gruesome episodes in the Bible. Here is the story in part: a woman has called upon the king of the besieged city for help, complaining, 'Mulier ista dixit mihi da filium tuum ut comedamus eum hodie et filium meum comedemus cras coximus ergo filium meum et comedimus dixique ei die altera da filium tuum ut comedamus eum quae abscondit filium suum' (this woman said to me: Give thy son, that we may eat him today, and we will eat my son tomorrow. So we boiled my son, and ate him. And I said to her on the next day: Give thy son that we may eat him. And she hath hid her son).¹⁶ The author of the *Vita* sees the biblical dearth both as a genuine historical event and as an analogue for his own time, useful as a means of reinforcing the reading of the fourteenth-century famine that he has already offered through his other scriptural citations and his use of prophecy. As a model story of desperation, sin and strange diet beyond even that of the Northumbrians – and of God's deliverance – the Samarian famine lends moral resonance to the contemporary account, and so emphasizes the connections the chronicler sees between God's grace and the health of the entire realm of England. He ends his list of good portents with a citation of Paul: 'Si Deus nobiscum, quis contra nos?' (If God be for us, who can be against us?).¹⁷

In her survey of English historical writing, Antonia Gransden character-

¹⁵ *Vita*, p. 90. Cf. II Kings 6:25, 28–29; 7:1, 16 (IV Kings in the Vulgate): 'Factusque est modius similae statere uno et duo modii hordei statere uno iuxta verbum Domini' (and a bushel of fine flour was sold for a stater, and two bushels of barley for a stater, according to the word of the Lord).

¹⁶ IV Kings 6:28–29.

¹⁷ *Vita*, p. 91 and n.1, quoting Romans 8:31. Among the other auspicious signs are the apparent reconciliation of Edward II and Thomas of Lancaster at the parliament of 1318 and a Host miracle in which a dove snatches the sacrament from the chaplain of the interdicted Robert Bruce (*Vita*, pp. 89–91).

izes the *Vita Edwardi Secundi* as ‘not a chronicle in the strict sense but a literary piece’. However, it is exactly those elements often considered ‘literary’ – biblical plot, phraseology, and prophetic technique – that constitute the anonymous author’s basic narrative material.¹⁸ Although his prophecies may seem disingenuous to modern readers, they do not represent merely compulsive or lapidary use of biblical language. They are his means of describing and explaining the recent past and putting it into context – an activity we can recognize as the writing of history. Within an understanding of history as a series of exemplary, morally comprehensible tales, the writer may see the relation of the events of the ancient and modern famines, and the role of Providence in them, as innate: his job is not to create a new connection but to discern and point out the one that God has already made. As Matthew Paris puts it:

Prodigia autem vel portenta praeterita quae famem, vel mortalitatem, vel alia supernae vindictae flagella fidelibus innuunt, ideo memoriae per literas commendantur, ut si quando similia evenerint, peccatores qui se iram Dei in aliquo incurrisse meminerint, mox ad remedium poenitentiae, per haec Deum placaturi, festinent.

(Prodigies or past portents that announce to the faithful hunger, or mortality, or other scourges of divine vengeance, are therefore to be commended to the memory by letters, so that when such events occur, sinners who remember having incurred the wrath of God against them in something may hasten quickly to the remedy of penitence, by which they may appease God.)¹⁹

By invoking the two famines as demonstrations of God’s justice and mercy, past and present, the writer of the *Vita Edwardi Secundi* is doing what had long been recognized as the historian’s job.

The chronicles written in later years generally offer less dramatic accounts of the famine of 1316. Without exception, they make some mention of the high price of grain and of widespread death, but accounts of strange diet are uncommon, and sensational details are not the only ones to drop out; references to bad weather and murrain also tend to decrease over time, as do those to the government’s attempts to control prices. That is, interest in causes of the crisis dwindles, while that in its

¹⁸ Gransden, *Historical Writing in England* (London, 1982), ii, p. 3.

¹⁹ *Matthaei Parisiensis chronica majora*, ed. H.R. Luard, Rolls Series, 57 (London, 1880), i, p. 1 and n., after the prologue to Robert of Torigny (d. 1186), in *Sigeberti Gemblacensis monachi opera omnia*, vol. 160 of *Patrologia latina*, ed. J.-P. Migne (Paris, 1880), col. 421. Translation mine.

effects survives. In general, the aspects of the famine that remained noteworthy to later historians were high prices, high mortality, scarcity of food and mass hunger.²⁰

The exception to this rule of increasing moderation is the annals of Bermondsey. They were probably written around 1433, though the portions on the years after 1206 were largely compiled from older documents within the priory, according to their editor, H.R. Luard, who believed that 'the compiler had access to a considerable number of authorities, and re-wrote the accounts they narrate in his own words'.²¹ The annals' few sentences given to the famine of 1316 are, then, far removed from the fact, if based on earlier sources. The account does not mention the rains that caused the dearth or the murrain that followed, but it nevertheless covers in some detail most of the spectacular elements of earlier versions, including this tale of strange diet: 'Pauperes enim pueros suos manducabant, canes, murelegos, sterCUS columbarum'.²² The claim that the poor ate their children, dogs and cats is lurid enough, but the Bermondsey book's last item, dove droppings, goes beyond sensationalism into surrealism. An explanation is called for, and it is not to be found in the events of 1316.

It is once again in the Bible, in the same story of the siege of Samaria that inspired the author of the *Vita Edwardi Secundi*. The price of an ass's head is not the only one mentioned: 'Factaque est famae magna in Samaria et tamdiu obsessa est donec venundaretur caput asini octoginta argenteis et quarta pars cabi stercoris columbarum quinque argenteis' (and there was a great famine in Samaria: and so long did the siege continue, till the head of an ass was sold for fourscore pieces of silver, and the fourth part of a cab of pigeon's dung for five pieces of silver).²³ The dove droppings have long presented a challenge to Bible readers. Augustine allegorizes the famine as the spiritual hunger of those who turn away from the worship of God and the droppings as the idols from which they vainly seek nourishment.²⁴ The Geneva Bible explains that

²⁰ See the Appendix for the sources on which these observations are based.

²¹ *Annales monasterii de Bermundesia*, in *Annales monastici*, ed. H.R. Luard, iii, 421–88, Rolls Series, 36 (London, 1866), iii, pp. xxxv, xxxvi, xxxviii.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 470. It continues, 'et ita crebro moriebantur, ut deesset morituris cura et mortuis sepultura' (and thus they were dying so thick and fast that there was not care for the dying or graves for the dead). Translation mine.

²³ IV Kings 6:25.

²⁴ Commentary on IV Kings 6 in the *Glossa ordinaria* (*Patrologia latina*, vol. 113, cols 615–16).

the dung was burnt in lieu of firewood.²⁵ The New Jerusalem Bible dismisses the dove droppings as impossible and suggests an alternative Hebrew term meaning 'wild onions'. The latest English version of the Tanakh, while translating the phrase as 'doves' dung', glosses it as a popular term for carob pods.²⁶ The writer of the Bermondsey book, in a day when the droppings were understood to have served as food, has not only taken the words literally but transplanted and represented the consumption of the dung as a fourteenth-century event, one so outrageous that it can have no basis but the literary one.²⁷

Once we have seen this biblical particular so wholly assimilated into recent history, we may begin to consider II Kings as a potential source for other elements of the Bermondsey account as well, specifically for the parents who devour their own children. The story of the cannibal mothers of Samaria is by no means the only or even the most grisly cannibalism in the Bible, though it is the only specific instance recounted as historical fact. Cannibalism – always parents eating their children – otherwise appears in curses, predictions or laments, invariably associated with famine and usually with the wrath of God.²⁸ In these instances, the beleaguered people of Israel must sacrifice their children not out of dutiful obedience to the Lord, as Abraham was ready to do, but as the final consequence of the sinfulness that separates them from God and brings disaster upon them.

Although the brief Bermondsey annal has not adopted precise biblical language and makes no explicit reference to the Bible, we must suspect that the Bible's cannibalism has influenced the account when we see what has unmistakably happened to the dove droppings. The writer need not have consciously chosen to exploit the biblical detail, as the author of the *Vita Edwardi Secundi* does, for it may well have emerged as a

²⁵ *The Geneva Bible*, reprint (Madison, Wisconsin, 1969).

²⁶ *The New Jerusalem Bible* (Garden City, New York, 1985); *The Tanakh* (Philadelphia, 1985).

²⁷ Even Josephus' claim that the starving citizens of Jerusalem picked apart 'old cow dung' in search of undigested plant matter (*Jewish War*, v. 571) is more credible than that for bird droppings, since their ammonia content would make them not only unpalatable but poisonous.

²⁸ See, for example, Leviticus 26:27–29, Deuteronomy 28:53–57, and Lamentations 4:10. Josephus similarly offers in some detail the story (repeated in the subsequent versions listed in n. 4) of a cannibal mother, who acts as much in protest and witness as for survival. She tells her child, 'With the Romans slavery awaits us, should we live till they come; but famine is forestalling slavery, and more cruel than both are the rebels. Come, be thou food for me, to the rebels an avenging fury, and to the world a tale such as alone is wanting to the calamities of the Jews' (*Jewish War*, vi, 206–7).

fourteenth-century incident in another of the sources he used. Whatever the Bermondsey chronicler's intentions, the story in II Kings informs the narrative not as a particular example but as a universal type of famine. The biblical story has assumed such authority that the monastic historian (whether the Bermondsey annalist or his source) knows through it what happens in terrible famines. He knows that the famine of 1316 was terrible, and therefore he knows what happened in it, or at least he knows a way to communicate the truth of its horror, a truth about famine that does not depend on the incidental specifics we think of as facts. In short, he understands and represents the famine as a disaster of biblical proportions.

The appearance of Samarian pigeon dung in fourteenth-century England reminds us to exercise caution when consulting this or any annal for factual information, for the last thing it means is that people really ate bird droppings, much less each other. In fact, all medieval English reports of cannibalism known to me either themselves voice reservations about the story or appear to be of biblical descent: they constitute no evidence of the actual incidence of cannibalism.²⁹ As W. Arens says, in his critical study of anthropological belief in cannibalism as a socially accepted phenomenon, 'Like the poor, cannibals are always with us, but happily just beyond the possibility of actual observation'.³⁰ I do not in the slightest, however, wish to imply that all the common themes of narratives of famine are really or primarily literary. Many of them recur in the description of this and other famines because the same sad things do recur in time of famine: prices do rise, people do go hungry and – as recent years in Africa have shown – the dead may truly be too numerous to bury. Nevertheless, as the Bermondsey book demonstrates, these topics can also take on a literary existence of their own. Some of these topoi, such as reports of parental cannibalism, may be entirely literary in origin, and their literary nature may affect or even

²⁹ English accounts of cannibalism in the famine of 1316 not discussed in this essay are those of the Long Continuation of the Anglo-Norman prose *Brut* (published and better known in its later Middle English translation), which bears some similarity to the Bermondsey account; the chronicle of John de Trokelowe; and Thomas Walsingham's *Historia anglicana*, which draws directly on John de Trokelowe. BL, MS Cotton Cleopatra D.3, fos 152v–153r; *The Brut: or The Chronicles of England*, ed. F.W.D. Brie, EETS, original series, 131 (London, 1906), i, pp. 209–10; *Johannis de Trokelowe et Henrici de Blaneforde chronica et annales*, pt 3 of *Chronica monasterii S. Albani*, ed. H. T. Riley, Rolls Series, 28 (London, 1869), pp. 88–98; and Thomas Walsingham, *Historia anglicana*, pt 1 of *Chronica monasterii S. Albani*, 1, pp. 144–50.

³⁰ W. Arens, *The Man-Eating Myth: Anthropology and Anthropophagy* (Oxford, 1979), p. 166.

govern other medieval historical narratives as they clearly do this one.

The stylized account in the Bermondsey book calls attention to itself precisely because it defies acceptance at face value. Until the biblical norm of description that so dominates the plot is recognized, the story makes no sense – if it makes sense even then. Although the annal's depiction of the crisis of 1316 partakes of a general idea of famine that is founded in scripture, in this case the allusion no longer bears any explicit relation to the moral lessons associated with it both in the Bible and in the *Vita Edwardi Secundi*. In the *Vita*, the author draws an analogy between Samaria and England, but the famine as represented in the Bermondsey book does not resemble the Samarian famine: it is indistinguishable from the Samarian famine. We have moved from analogy to equivalence. As an authoritative definition of famine, the biblical story gains a certain power, but, whereas the interpretive mechanism by which to read the Samarian and English famines is firmly in place in the *Vita Edwardi Secundi*, in the Bermondsey book it is not apparent. It is either implicit, with the burden of recognition and interpretation on the reader, or it has dropped out altogether.

The Samarian famine is important and useful to a Christian writer in the first place because of its peculiar exegetical status as part of the Old Testament record: it is both a particular past historical event and an object of textual interpretation, both actual and metaphorical, both literal and allegorical. But in the case of the Bermondsey book, we are not in a position to judge whether the chronicler or his readers even knew that the dove droppings came from the Bible. Their appearance in the annal certainly constitutes evidence of the Bible's pervasive presence in the life of a monastic writer; they may also constitute evidence of the breakdown of a system of signification into dead metaphor. In its role as a universal type of famine, the Samarian famine may in a sense become too figurative for its own good and compromise the privileged textual and historical status that gave it its original allegorical power. At this remove of textual transmission, the famine may still provide moral commentary, or it may simply be a manifestation of a *topos* that has come loose from its original interpretive moorings.

These two accounts of the famine of 1316 extract their truths from II Kings in different ways. In the annals of Bermondsey, the dramatic story of the English famine loses its particularity to become an illustration of a general idea of famine grown out of scripture. The *Vita Edwardi Secundi* provides a concrete example of a moral theory of history in practice, as it borrows biblical authority to confirm past events, to predict ostensibly future ones and to make its ethical points clear. The Bermondsey

chronicler certainly has a perspective on the events he describes, a universal and universalizing one that reveals much more about the idea of famine in the fifteenth century than about the events of the famine of 1316. In a less drastic but still discernible way, the author of the *Vita Edwardi Secundi* seems to have shrouded the immediacy of his story for us by tailoring it to flatter its historical and moral shapeliness. In both cases, the Bible does more than provide a pattern for historical narrative: it possesses universal applicability and even the power to define historical truth.

Appendix

Published Medieval English Reports of the Famine of 1316

- Annales Londonienses*, in *Chronicles of the Reigns of Edward I and Edward II*, ed. W. Stubbs, Rolls Series, 76 (London, 1882), i, pp. 231–41.
- Annales monasterii de Bermundesia*, in *Annales monastici*, ed. H.R. Luard, Rolls Series, 36 (London, 1866), iii, p. 470.
- Annales Paulini*, in *Chronicles of the Reigns of Edward I and Edward II*, i, pp. 278–79.
- Geoffrey le Baker, *Chronicon Galfridi le Baker de Swinbroke*, ed. E.M. Thompson (Oxford, 1899), p. 9.
- The Brut: or The Chronicles of England*, ed. F.W.D. Brie, EETS, original series, 131 (London, 1906), i, pp. 209–10.
- John Capgrave, *The Chronicle of England*, ed. F.C. Hingeston, Rolls Series, 1 (London, 1858), p. 181.
- Chronica monasterii de Melsa*, ed. E.A. Bond, Rolls Series, 43 (London, 1867), ii, pp. 318, 332–34, 392.
- Chronicon abbatie de Parco Lude*, ed. E. Venables (Lincoln, 1891), pp. 24–27.
- Chronicon de Lanercost, 1201–1346*, ed. J. Stevenson (Edinburgh, 1839), p. 233.
- Chroniques de London depuis l'an 44 Hen. III jusqu'à l'an 17 Edw. III*, ed. G.J. Aungier (London, 1844), pp. 38–39.
- Elogium historiarum*, ed. F. S. Haydon, Rolls Series, 9 (London, 1863), iii, p. 195.
- Flores historiarum*, ed. H.R. Luard, Rolls Series, 95 (London, 1890), iii, pp. 160–61, 171–74, 186, 340–41.
- Gesta Edwardi de Carnarvon auctore canonico Bridlingtonensi*, in *Chronicles of the Reigns of Edward I and Edward II*, ii, pp. 47–50.
- Ranulph Higden, *Polychronicon*, ed. J.R. Lumby, Rolls Series, 41 (London, 1882), viii, pp. 300, 306–9.
- Henry Knighton, *Chronicon Henrici Knighton*, ed. J.R. Lumby, Rolls Series, 92 (London, 1889), i, pp. 411–12.
- Adam Murimuth, *Adae Murimuth continuatio chronicarum Robertus de Avesbury de gestis mirabilibus regis Edwardi Tertii*, ed. E.M. Thompson, Rolls Series, 93 (London, 1889), p. 24.
- John de Trokelowe, *Johannis de Trokelowe annales*, in *Johannis de Trokelowe et Henrici de Blaneforde chronica et annales*, pt 3 of *Chronica monasterii S. Albani*, ed. H.T. Riley, Rolls Series, 28 (London, 1869), pp. 88–98.
- Vita Edwardi Secundi*, ed. and trans. Noël Denholm-Young (London, 1957), pp. 64–70, 90.

- Thomas Walsingham, *Historia anglicana*, pt 1 of *Chronica monasterii S. Albani*, i, pp. 144–50.
—, *Ypodigma Neustriae*, pt 7 of *Chronica monasterii S. Albani*, pp. 247–49.

Driven by Drink? Ale Consumption and the Agrarian Economy of the London Region, c.1300–1400

James A. Galloway

This essay explores some economic implications of changes in human diet, taking as an example the consumption of ale in London and its region during the fourteenth century.¹ It touches only briefly upon the brewing industry in its social and technical aspects, areas which have been the subject of detailed researches by such scholars as Rodney Hilton, Judith Bennett and Richard Unger.² Instead, after reviewing some general features of ale production and consumption, the essay moves on to assess the evidence for an increase in *per caput* ale consumption after the Black Death. It concludes by examining the relationship between this apparent increase and changes in the patterns of crop production and disposal during the fourteenth century, as revealed by recent research into demesne agriculture within the London region.

Alcoholic drinks constitute a ready and rapidly absorbed source of energy for human beings.³ This factor, allied to their potentially pleasurable effects and association with social intercourse, have led to their widespread consumption across different cultures and historical periods. Europe, in the middle ages as today, broadly divided into areas which produced their principal alcoholic drinks from the grape and those which

¹ I am grateful to Derek Keene and Margaret Murphy for their helpful comments on an earlier version of this essay.

² e.g. R.H. Hilton, ‘Pain et cervoise dans les villes anglaises au moyen âge’, in *L’approvisionnement des villes de l’Europe occidentale au moyen âge et aux temps modernes*, Cinquièmes journées internationales d’histoire, 16–18 Septembre 1983 (Auch, 1985), pp. 221–29; J.M. Bennett, ‘Conviviality and Charity in Medieval and Early-Modern England’, *Past and Present*, 134 (1992), pp. 19–41; eadem, ‘Women and Men in the Brewers’ Gild of London, c. 1420’, in E.B. DeWindt, ed., *The Salt of Common Life: Essays in Honor of J. Ambrose Raftis* (Kalamazoo, Michigan, 1995), pp. 181–232; R. Unger, ‘Technical Changes in the Brewing Industry in Germany, the Low Countries and England in the Late Middle Ages’, *Journal of European Economic History*, 21 (1992), pp. 281–314.

³ *Manual of Nutrition*, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food reference book 342 (London, 1985), pp. 82–83.

brewed ale, and later beer,⁴ from grain. The boundary between the two zones has not always been sharp, but it is evident that for most of recorded history southern England has lain at, or close to, the northernmost limit for viticulture in Europe, a limit set not by the coldness of winters, but by the lack of sufficient summer warmth and sunshine to ripen grapes.⁵ Today commercial vineyards, using modern grape varietals and techniques, produce palatable, mostly white wines in Kent and Sussex, the Thames valley and parts of south-western England. These were also the principal areas where wine-making took place in the middle ages, as indicated by Domesday Book and by later manorial accounts and extents.⁶

Although quite common, medieval English wine-making seems to have been generally small-scale and unreliable as to quality, production of wine alternating with that of verjuice (the juice of unripe grapes, used in cooking) and vinegar. Thus, the earl of Lincoln's garden in the London suburb of Holborn produced only verjuice from its vines in 1295–96, but both verjuice and wine in 1304–05.⁷ It seems that only large-scale and sustained investment in skilled labour and plants could ensure reasonably consistent production of drinkable wine, as at the royal vineyard adjoining Windsor Castle.⁸ Most of the wine drunk in England was imported, and hence it remained relatively expensive and largely restricted to the better-off sections of society.

Mead was probably drunk by the peasantry of parts of western England, while cider was quite widely produced and drunk.⁹ Nevertheless, in the absence of large-scale domestic wine production, the mass-consumption alcoholic drink of England was undoubtedly ale, brewed from a variety of malted grains, but, in the London region of the fourteenth century, principally from barley and the mixture of barley and oats known as dredge.¹⁰ Oats on their own – although primarily a fodder crop for

⁴ Ale, unlike beer, is produced without the use of hops. Beer was known in fourteenth-century England, but was not at that period a significant domestic manufacture.

⁵ T. Unwin, *Wine and the Vine: An Historical Geography of Viticulture and the Wine Trade* (London and New York, 1991), pp. 34–35, 42–43.

⁶ J. Harvey, *Medieval Gardens* (London, 1981), p. 54.

⁷ J.A. Galloway and M. Murphy, 'Feeding the City: Medieval London and its Agrarian Hinterland', *London Journal*, 16 (1991), pp. 3–14, here p. 9.

⁸ R.A. Brown, H.M. Colvin and A.J. Taylor, *The History of the King's Works*, ii, *The Middle Ages* (London, 1963) p. 881 n. 4.

⁹ P. Clark, *The English Alehouse: A Social History* (London, 1983), p. 24.

¹⁰ For the use of the various grains in the London region, see B.M.S. Campbell, J.A. Galloway, D. Keene and M. Murphy, *A Medieval Capital and its Grain Supply: Agrarian Production and Distribution in the London Region, c.1300*, Historical Geography Research Series, 30 (1993), esp. pp. 24–27.

working animals – were sometimes used to produce a lower-grade ale, a practice which, although still followed even in some London establishments, was becoming less common within the region. Wheat was also malted on occasion, in order to produce a high-grade ale, but there is no evidence that rye was used as a brewing grain in south-eastern England at this period. Broadly, then, the brewing industry drew upon the region's production of barley and dredge, while wheat and rye were grown principally for baking into bread.¹¹

By the fourteenth century ale production was an almost omnipresent industry in England. Ale was brewed for consumption within the household, for sale to others, and for consumption at the 'ales' held for various social and charitable purposes.¹² Every community of any size had its brewers, the majority operating on a small scale, whose existence is documented in series of surviving court rolls from rural manors and towns alike. Brewers were regularly fined, nominally for breaches of regulations but, in reality, probably as a form of licensing.¹³ The brewers were very often women and, in the countryside, commercial brewing seems to have been most characteristic of the middle years of women's married lives.¹⁴

Brewers have left distinctive archeological evidence of their activities, particularly in towns, in the form of malting ovens, hearths and furnaces and, occasionally, deposits of germinated, burnt grain.¹⁵ Large numbers of townsmen and women were involved in the manufacture and retailing of ale. In 1386, 106 brewers were fined at one of the regular court sessions held at Maidstone in Kent, implying that as many as one-third of the town's households may have been involved in the production of ale at that time.¹⁶ Each court at the Essex market town of (Saffron) Walden c. 1400 saw some twenty-five brewers amerced, but in addition an average of thirty people were fined for 'regrating' ale, that is, buying to resell.¹⁷ Larger towns may have been home to larger-scale brewing operations, although here too there were many small producers. Early

¹¹ Although barley was widely used to make bread in some other parts of England, this does not seem to have been the case in London and its immediate hinterland. Campbell et al., *A Medieval Capital*, p. 26.

¹² Bennett, 'Conviviality and Charity'.

¹³ R.H. Britnell, *Growth and Decline in Colchester, 1300–1525* (Cambridge, 1986), p. 89.

¹⁴ J.M. Bennett, *Women in the Medieval English Countryside* (Oxford, 1987), pp. 120–24.

¹⁵ J. Schofield and A. Vince, *Medieval Towns* (London, 1994), pp. 76, 119.

¹⁶ R. Holt, 'The Medieval Market Town', chapter 2 of P. Clark and L. Murfin, *The History of Maidstone* (Stroud, 1996), p. 31.

¹⁷ Essex Record Office, D/DBy M1–4.

fourteenth-century Colchester, with perhaps 3000 to 4000 inhabitants, regularly had over one hundred brewers amerced at its thrice-yearly lawhundred courts.¹⁸ In the much larger town of Norwich, which may have had a population of 25,000 in 1330, 250 to 300 brewers were amerced each year in the pre-Black Death period.¹⁹

Strictly comparable figures are not available for London. However, if the ratio between population and number of brewers was similar to that at Norwich, then, on the basis that London may have had a population of some 80,000 in 1300, it might have supported the activities of somewhere between 800 and 1000 brewers at that date.²⁰ If, on the other hand, the ratio more closely resembled that prevailing at Colchester, the London brewers may have numbered more than 2500. A chronicle source, the *Annales Londonienses*, reports that 1334 brewers responded to a summons to appear at the Guildhall in 1309, together with 354 taverners, numbers which would not have included those living in the inhabited areas beyond the city's jurisdiction.²¹ Although we cannot tell how accurate these apparently precise figures were, the order of magnitude they denote seems entirely plausible.

Clearly, it is dangerous to assume any fixed relation between population and number of brewers. There was some tendency for the scale of brewing operations to increase during the later middle ages, a trend which has been documented in both rural and urban contexts.²² This development, though in part explicable by administrative changes, and by the growth of beer-brewing after c. 1400, is probably also to be associated with an increase in permanent or semi-permanent alehouses, which may have been more characteristic of town than of countryside, and of large than of small towns, from an early date.²³ Such premises were highly visible; 'ale-stakes' – poles with brush-leaves or some other sign at the end – were displayed to advertise a fresh brew, and a well-known

¹⁸ R.H. Britnell, *Growth and Decline*, p. 269.

¹⁹ E. Rutledge, 'Immigration and Population Growth in Early-Fourteenth Century Norwich: Evidence from the Tithing Roll', *Urban History Yearbook* 1988, pp. 15–30; Hilton, 'Pain et cervoise', p. 228.

²⁰ For London's population, see D. Keene, 'Medieval London and its Region', *London Journal*, 14 (1989), pp. 99–111.

²¹ W. Stubbs, ed., *Chronicles of the Reigns of Edward I and Edward II*, 1, *Annales Londonienses and Annales Paulini*, Rolls Series (London, 1882), p. 267.

²² D. Postles, 'Brewing and the Peasant Economy: Some Manors in Late Medieval Devon', *Rural History*, 3 (1992), pp. 133–44; *Victoria County History of Oxfordshire*, iv, *City of Oxford*, p. 47.

²³ D. Keene, *Survey of Medieval Winchester* (Oxford, 1985), pp. 267–69; Clark, *English Alehouse*, p. 31.

London ordinance prohibited these stakes from being more than seven feet long.²⁴

The ubiquity of brewing is in part a reflection of the difficulties of preserving ale, which quite rapidly 'went off'. Carting or shipping ale over long distances was thus problematic, although not unknown.²⁵ Most ale was drunk where it was made, or obtained from a close at hand town or village. The extent of the market was consequently quite restricted for most brewers and, as a result, frequent small brewings had advantages over the production of large batches. The requirement that ale should be drunk while fresh also influenced the pattern of brewing in aristocratic households.²⁶ As well as reflecting technical limitations on the scale of production and marketing, however, the huge number of brewers in fourteenth-century England undoubtedly points to the widespread consumption of ale across the social spectrum, from peasantry to aristocracy. Different grades and strengths of ale were brewed, aimed at different tastes and pockets. There is no truth in the statement, sometimes encountered in older studies, that medieval ale was universally weak and watery.²⁷ Household accounts show that a quarter of malted grain normally produced somewhere between fifty and one hundred gallons of ale, with most brewings in the range of fifty to seventy-five; if the brewing were effective, in that the bulk of the natural sugars in the malt were converted into alcohol, this would imply alcohol-by-volume contents at least comparable to modern beers.²⁸

Intoxication is shown in literary references to follow levels of consumption of ale which, although high, are not beyond modern north-European comprehension. Thus, in *Piers Plowman*, Glutton consumes 'a gallon and a gill' in a London alehouse before finding that he cannot walk or stand without his staff, stumbling about like a bird-catcher or a minstrel's dog, and finally passing out, falling flat on his face at the

²⁴ R.R. Sharpe, ed., *Calendar of Letter-Books Preserved among the Archives of the Corporation of London at the Guildhall, Letter-Book H* (London, 1907), p. 12.

²⁵ Barrels of ale are frequently listed in the *Calendar of Close Rolls* (London, various dates) among provisions sent to Calais: see, for example, *ibid.*, 1389–92, pp. 28–29; and 1392–26, p. 143.

²⁶ This is well illustrated by the household of Dame Alice de Bryene, where there were never more than six days between brewings in the year 1412–13: E.M.M. Price, 'A Tally of Ale', *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society*, series A, 123 (1960), pp. 62–67. See below, Chapter 9.

²⁷ See for example G.T. Salusbury Jones, *Street Life in Medieval England* (Oxford, 1938), p. 98.

²⁸ H.S. Corran, *A History of Brewing* (London, 1975), pp. 29–30.

alehouse door.²⁹ Again, according to a rhyme found endorsed on a Court of Common Pleas roll for 1371 and translated by Edith Rickert, a gallon of ale was sufficient to ‘bind legal senses, legal tongues’, smaller quantities being associated with varying degrees of euphoria and loquaciousness.³⁰ Such references suggest that the alcoholic content of ale sold in a fourteenth-century London alehouse may have been broadly comparable to that of a medium-strength modern beer, although speed and degree of intoxication are influenced by many other factors.³¹

Did the average quantities of ale drunk increase during the fourteenth century, as population fell under the impact of plague and real living standards rose? Common sense suggests that they did, as wages rose markedly after 1349 while the prices of the grain and malt from which ale was made moved more cyclically (Fig. 1).³² The divergence between prices and wages is particularly marked from the 1370s onwards, as a longer-term slump in grain prices set in. Nevertheless, hard evidence relating to ale consumption, particularly of a quantitative kind, is scarce. The issue is, however, one with major implications for the agricultural economy. Brewing is much more wasteful of the energy value of grain than is baking; while converting a given quantity of raw grain into bread entails a calorific loss of the order of 15 per cent, in brewing the loss is around 70 per cent, four to five times greater, a difference only partially offset by the use of the by-products of brewing as animal fodder.³³ In other words, brewing is very greedy of grain and is, in pure energy terms, an inefficient use of grain resources. Patterns of consumption of bread and ale, and any changes in their relative importance in human diet, can thus have a major impact upon both the overall size and the structure of the market for grain.

Any changes in the level of ale consumption in fourteenth-century London – which formed by far the largest and most concentrated centre of demand for foodstuffs in medieval England – could be expected to have had a significant effect upon those rural areas which supplied the

²⁹ W. Langland, *Will's Vision of Piers Ploughman*, trans. E.T. Donaldson (New York and London, 1990), p. 50.

³⁰ E. Rickert, *Chaucer's England* (Oxford, 1948), p. 239.

³¹ Food consumption, acquired tolerance and genetic factors can all play a role: see D.B. Goldstein, *The Pharmacology of Alcohol* (New York and Oxford, 1983).

³² The data on which Figure 1 is based are drawn from D.L. Farmer, ‘Prices and Wages’ in E. Miller, ed., *The Agrarian History of England and Wales*, iii, 1348–1500 (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 444, 471; and J.E.T. Rogers, *A History of Agriculture and Prices in England*, ii, (Oxford, 1866), pp. 54–168.

³³ Campbell et al., *A Medieval Capital*, p. 34.

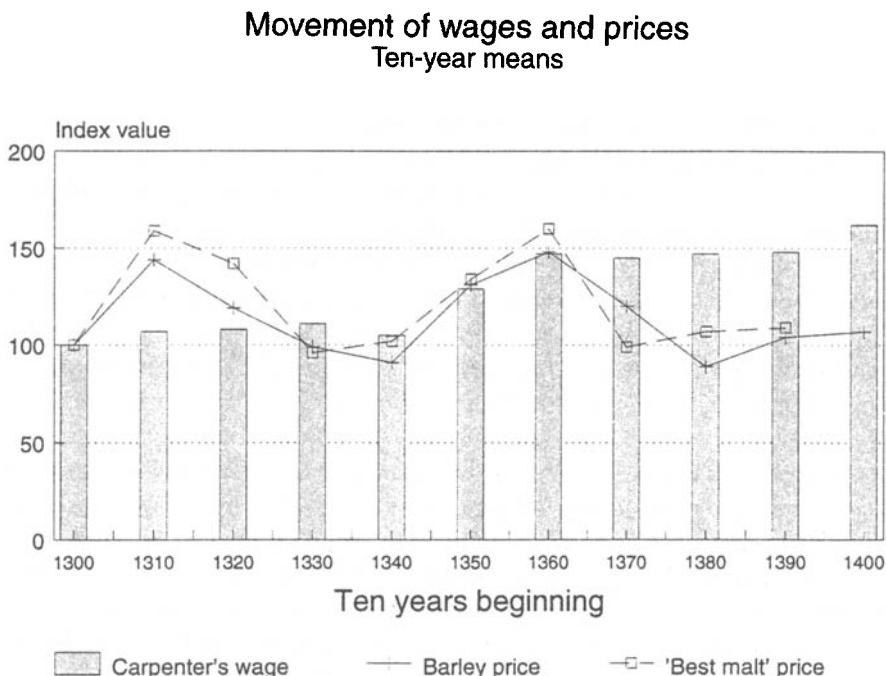


Figure 1: Movement of barley and malt prices compared to carpenters' wages, 1300–1410 (source: see note 32).

city with grain. It seems likely that London's population virtually halved between the beginning and end of the fourteenth century, declining from perhaps 80,000 or more to 40–50,000 people. However, if it is postulated that Londoners obtained the same total quantity of energy *per caput* from grain in 1400 as in 1300, but that their average ale consumption increased between the two dates from one pint to three pints per day, that change would by itself have substantially offset the effect of the steep decline in the city's population upon its total grain requirement.³⁴ It would, however, imply a very marked shift in the structure of that requirement, away from the bread grains, wheat and rye, and towards barley and dredge, the principal brewing grains. An absolute or relative increase in brewing would also have had implications for the city's fuel supply, a crucial constraint upon pre-industrial urban growth.³⁵

³⁴ Based upon the calculations in Campbell, et al., *A Medieval Capital*, p. 35.

³⁵ J.A. Galloway, D. Keene and M. Murphy, 'Fuelling the City: Production and Distribution of Firewood and Fuel in London's Region, 1290–1400', *Economic History Review*, 49 (1996), pp. 447–72, here pp. 469–70.

Unfortunately, direct evidence of consumption levels, which might serve to validate such assumptions, is scarce, often ambiguous and usually relates to restricted and probably atypical sections of society. It will thus never be possible to say with confidence how much ale the average medieval Londoner drank in a day, or in a year. It is, however, possible to draw upon evidence relating to some of those better-documented groups in order to assess whether there was a general movement in levels of ale consumption, and in the balance of cereal-derived calories which came from ale vis-à-vis bread, during the fourteenth century. Thus, accounts for aristocratic and monastic households shed some light on the overall quantities of bread and ale consumed. Per capita consumption is, however, usually elusive. Where daily allowances of ale are recorded, they are often very high, reaching one to two gallons each per day in some religious houses, but it is difficult to be sure that these quantities were intended to slake the thirst of just one individual; sometimes it is clear that they were not, and that servants consumed a part of the allowance. It is, however, sometimes possible to examine relative quantities of bread and ale consumed across households as a whole, or to chart relative expenditure on bread vis-à-vis brewing grains, and hence to deduce broad changes in consumption patterns. Available statistics for a variety of households point to a generally higher level of expenditure on ale relative to bread in the fifteenth century than in the pre-Black Death period.³⁶ In absolute, as well as relative, terms more was often spent on ale and brewing grains than on bread and wheat; thus John de Veere's household spent some £36 on malt in the year 1431–32, compared to £27 on wheat.³⁷ Any shift away from bread towards ale within aristocratic household budgets seems more likely to reflect a change in the consumption patterns of household officers and servants than of the family members themselves.

Even in ecclesiastical households, where allowances (if not actual consumption) of ale were already very high by c. 1300, there seems to be a tendency for a shift in relative quantities to take place. At Westminster Abbey in 1304–5 more wheat was consumed than barley and dredge, but by the 1370s the situation had been reversed.³⁸ This trend appears

³⁶ See for example C. Dyer, *Standards of Living in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1989), table 3, p. 56.

³⁷ C.M. Woolgar, ed., *Household Accounts from Medieval England* (Oxford, 1993), no. 20.

³⁸ Campbell et al., *A Medieval Capital*, p. 204; Westminster Abbey Muniments (WAM), 19177–8. There is, however, some uncertainty over the precise uses to which large quantities of oats received at the earlier date were put.

to have continued through the later middle ages, as in 1526–27 the abbey's brewhouse used 1209 quarters of malt, while the bakehouse used 555 quarters of flour, probably the product of 555 quarters of wheat.³⁹ Monastic drinking may have peaked around that time; it has been estimated that alcohol, taken in the form of wine as well as ale, may have contributed as much as 19 per cent to the energy value of the daily diet of monks at Westminster Abbey c.1500, compared to perhaps 5 per cent in average diets today.⁴⁰

Evidence from quite different sections of society also points to increased consumption of ale. Christopher Dyer's study of the food and drink allowances given to harvest workers demonstrates a marked increase in both absolute and relative quantities of ale between the thirteenth and early fifteenth centuries.⁴¹ At Sedgeworth in Norfolk ale, measured in terms of the value of foodstuffs consumed, rose from around 10–15 per cent of the total before 1300 to over 30 per cent after 1400. Bread showed a corresponding decline, from nearly 50 per cent of the total value to under 20 per cent. It seems probable that an increase in ale consumption took place across rural society as a whole, and that the proportion of the population too poor to drink it at all, or only rarely, was significantly smaller in 1400 than in 1300. Much of this drinking probably took place outside the home; fifteenth-century preachers and moralists frequently note and deprecate the tendency of the English peasantry to congregate in alehouses.⁴²

The urban poor were also probably drinking less water and more ale by 1400. In 1345 a London ordinance had described water as the drink of the poor, in censuring the brewers for taking water from a conduit in the city. While the brewers were said to be depriving 'the rich and middling sort' of water for preparing food, they were robbing 'the poor [of] their drink'.⁴³ A generation later, after the impact of plague had wrought major changes in society, there are indications that ale, like bread, was coming to be regarded as a staple food. A London ordinance of 1381–82 required brewers as well as bakers to sell their products by farthing measures 'in order to assist the poor . . . the mayor and aldermen deem-

³⁹ WAM 18941.

⁴⁰ B. Harvey, *Living and Dying in England, 1100–1540: The Monastic Experience* (Oxford, 1993), pp. 57–58.

⁴¹ C. Dyer, 'Changes in Diet in the Late Middle Ages: The Case of Harvest Workers', in *idem, Everyday Life in Medieval England* (London, 1994), pp. 77–100.

⁴² Mark Bailey, 'Rural Society', in R. Horrox, ed., *Fifteenth-Century Attitudes: Perceptions of Society in Late Medieval England* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 150–68.

⁴³ H.T. Riley, ed., *Memorials of London and London Life* (London, 1868), p. 225.

ing [ale] equally necessary to the poor as in the case of bread'.⁴⁴ Henceforth no brewer was to refuse to sell a farthing's worth of best ale on demand, or to refuse to give change for a halfpenny.

Drinking alcoholic beverages had, of course, long been an important feature of metropolitan life – Fitz Stephen, in the twelfth century, counted the ‘immoderate drinking of fools’ among the plagues afflicting the city – but in the later fourteenth century it was probably an enjoyment open to more of the population than ever before.⁴⁵ The alehouse in which Glutton passed out is depicted as filled by representatives of a broad swathe of middling- and lower-class London society, male and female, among them craftsmen, musicians, aliens, petty traders, a Cheapside scavenger, the Tyburn hangman, a parson, a parish clerk, a watchman and so on.⁴⁶ There seems little reason to doubt, whatever Langland’s wider allegorical purpose, that this was intended as an entirely plausible clientele for a London alehouse.

These changes in drinking habits were beginning to have a major impact upon the agricultural economy of London’s region, as revealed by a systematic study based upon the evidence of manorial accounts.⁴⁷ By the last quarter of the fourteenth century the total amount of land devoted to arable farming in southern England was probably somewhat smaller than it had been in 1300, as the area under pasture expanded and livestock numbers increased. Much more striking, however, were changes *within* the arable sector, where cultivation of the brewing grains, especially barley, expanded markedly (Fig. 2). Thus barley, which had occupied 13 per cent of the total area sown with grain on manorial

⁴⁴ *Calendar of Letter-Books, H*, ed. Sharpe, p. 183.

⁴⁵ W. Fitz Stephen, ‘A Description of London’, in *Norman London*, introduction by F.D. Logan (New York, 1990), p. 55.

⁴⁶ Langland, *Piers Plowman*, p. 49.

⁴⁷ The ‘Feeding the City’ project, which ran from 1988 to 1994 at the Centre for Metropolitan History, Institute of Historical Research, University of London, in collaboration with the Queen’s University, Belfast. Funded in its successive stages by the Leverhulme Trust and the Economic and Social Research Council (award number R000233157), the project compiled computer databases from manorial demesne accounts for 204 manors in the London region in the period 1288–1315 and 141 manors in the period 1375–1400. Statistics on crop production and disposal quoted here derive from those databases. Aspects of the project’s methodology are discussed in the essay by Margaret Murphy in this volume. I am grateful to the directors of the first stage of the research, Derek Keene and Bruce Campbell, and to Margaret Murphy with whom I and they co-directed the second stage, for permission to use ‘Feeding the City’ data. Changes in grain production, distribution and consumption in the London region during the fourteenth century form the subject of an extended paper currently in draft.

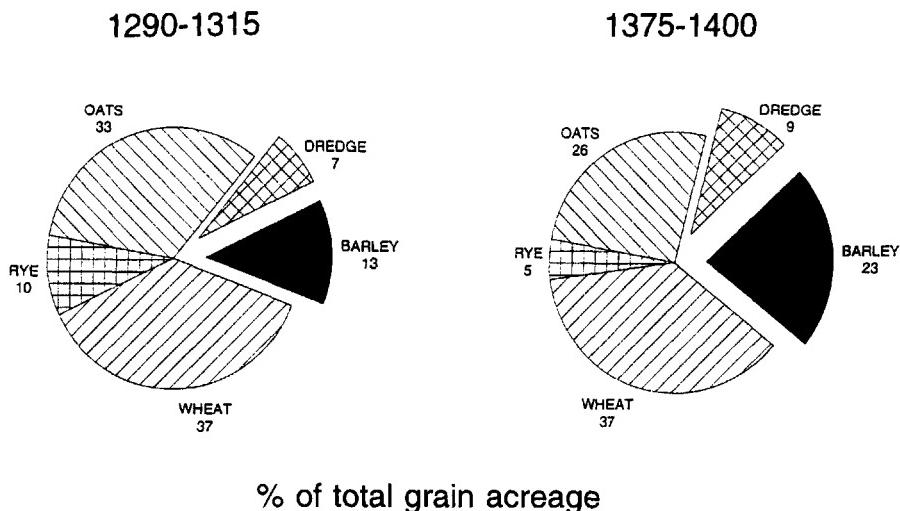


Figure 2: Percentage of sown grain acreage occupied by individual crops on demesnes in the London region, 1290–1315 and 1375–1400 (source: see notes 47 and 48).

demesnes in the London region *c.* 1300, accounted for 23 per cent in the period 1375–1400.⁴⁸ While wheat retained its preeminent position, the grains used for making cheaper and coarser bread – principally rye and its admixtures known as maslin and mancorn – shrank from 10 per cent to less than 5 per cent of the grain acreage.

Even more telling are statistics relating to the relative quantities of the different grains which entered into commercial exchange (Fig. 3). In the years around 1300 wheat had accounted for 43 per cent of all the grain sold by manorial demesnes in the London region, but by the last quarter of the fourteenth century this had declined to 28 per cent. Trade in the cheaper bread grains based on rye had shrunk away almost to nothing between the two periods, although they continued to form a small component of the liveries given to manorial servants.⁴⁹ Over the same period the principal brewing grains, barley and dredge, in both raw and malted state, expanded from 29 per cent to 49 per cent of the

⁴⁸ The 'London region' for which figures are quoted comprises the historic (pre-1974) counties of Bedfordshire, Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Essex, Hertfordshire, Kent, Middlesex, Northamptonshire, Oxfordshire and Surrey, and is shown on Figure 4 in Margaret Murphy's essay in this volume (p. 123, below).

⁴⁹ Wheat became increasingly important in these liveries during the course of the fourteenth century.

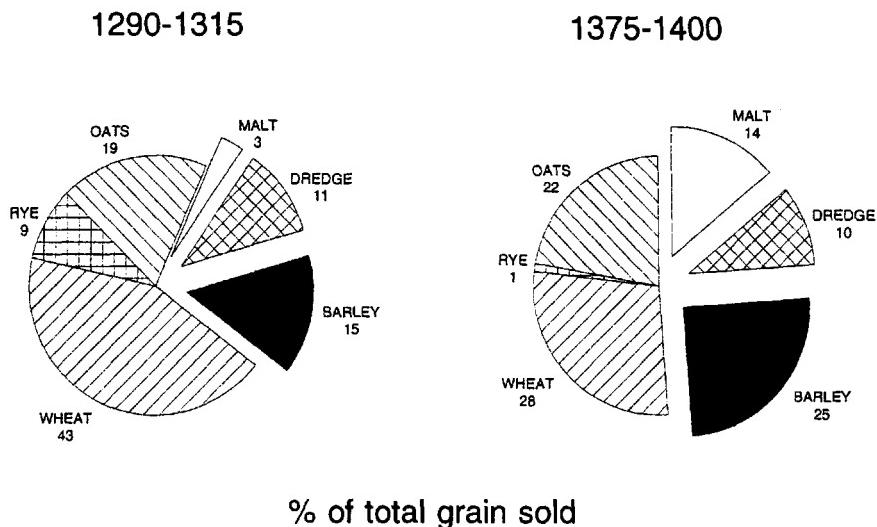


Figure 3: Percentage of all demesne grain sold (by volume) represented by individual crops in the London region, 1290–1315 and 1375–1400 (source: see notes 47 and 48).

total amount of grain sold. Thus, by the end of the fourteenth century, around one-half of all the demesne grain which was marketed in the London region was probably destined to be turned into ale.

These changes form part of a complex transformation in the economic geography of the London region, and of the economic and social structure of the city itself. In 1300 production of grain in London's hinterland had been characterized by patterns of specialization intelligible in terms of established geographical models, whereby relative bulk and transportability exert key influences upon the decision to grow one crop rather than another.⁵⁰ Change in the structure of metropolitan and regional demand for grain promoted reorganization of this grain production hinterland after the Black Death. The major expansion in cultivation of the brewing grains took place not in the immediate vicinity of London, but further afield.⁵¹ Northern and eastern Kent, which had been an important barley-producing area c.1300, continued to be so in the later fourteenth century. The most marked expansion came to the north and west of London, in parts of the counties of Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire,

⁵⁰ Campbell et al., *A Medieval Capital*, pp. 5–7, 111–13.

⁵¹ See the maps forming figures 1 and 2 in J.A. Galloway, 'London's Grain Supply: Changes in Production, Distribution and Consumption during the Fourteenth Century', *Franco-British Studies*, 20 (Autumn 1995), pp. 23–34.

Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire. In these parts of the region barley and dredge seem to have been replacing wheat as the main commercial crop, perhaps because when malted they could economically withstand transportation over greater distances than could wheat. Here the brewing grains frequently came to occupy 50 per cent or more of the acreage under grain by the later fourteenth century. This zone probably extended into the counties of Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire,⁵² which were named together with Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire and Northamptonshire in a parliamentary ordinance, proclaimed in the city in 1394, as sources of malt which should be carried to London and there sold for the benefit of the royal household, noble households and 'the entire population'.⁵³

Associated with this developing specialization, overland dealers and carriers of grain become increasingly prominent in both London and national records in the later fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. These dealers, often described as 'maltmen', appear particularly prominent in a range of small towns in north Middlesex and southern Hertfordshire, among the most important of which were Barnet, Enfield and Watford.⁵⁴ The maltmen appear to have acted as middlemen in the overland trade, using these towns as bases for their operations and carting to London the supplies needed by the city's brewers; much of the malt they handled seems likely to have originated further north, in the specialised barley-producing zone. Later evidence points to the regularity with which maltmen from such towns visited the capital; a maltman from Aldenham, near Watford in south Hertfordshire, charged in Chancery with abducting a female apprentice in the 1470s, was said to have visited London 'weekly by cause of his occupacion'.⁵⁵ In contrast to the increasing visibility of malt dealers and carriers, large-scale London-based cornmongers, specializing in the grain trade and handling principally wheat, become scarcer in the records, and appear to have

⁵² Not covered in the 'Feeding the City' databases.

⁵³ *Calendar of Letter-Books, H*, ed. Sharpe, p. 411.

⁵⁴ See for example *Calendar of Letter Books, H*, ed. Sharpe, pp. 17, 354; A.H. Thomas, ed., *Calendar of the Plea and Memoranda Rolls Preserved among the Archives of the Corporation of the City of London at Guildhall, 1364–81* (Cambridge, 1929), pp. 191–92. Other references are contained in databases compiled from records of debt litigation in national and local courts by the project 'Market Networks in the London Region: The Trade in Agrarian Produce c.1400', funded by the Leverhulme Trust and based at the Centre for Metropolitan History. The work of this project includes a more detailed reconstruction of the trade in malt, c.1400.

⁵⁵ *Victoria History of the County of Hertford*, iv (London, 1908), p. 411.

declined in influence as a group.⁵⁶ Early fourteenth-century London had been unique among English towns in having an organized corn-mongers' guild. After 1350 the guild seems to have declined in numbers and influence, however, and soon after 1400 references to it cease. Although many factors undoubtedly lay behind this development, the relative decline in the consumption of the bread grains, the trade in which had c. 1300 been heavily concentrated along the axis of the River Thames between Henley in Oxfordshire and Faversham in Kent, seems likely to have been among the most significant. A reduction in the overall size of the market, allied to falling prices, may have reduced the scope for the assured profits on which large-scale, specialized dealers depended.⁵⁷

Shifts in grain consumption patterns thus appear to have been promoting far-reaching changes in London-centred distributive systems, as well as in the agricultural sector. The post-Black Death changes were complex, as new regional specializations emerged and existing ones became strengthened or weakened in response to changes in demand. Some of the developments of the period, such as the rise to prominence of the overland trade in malt, appear to have laid the foundations for networks of supply which persisted into the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and beyond. The grain sector was not the only one to undergo significant change, driven by improving living standards and shifting patterns of consumption. Parallel shifts were taking place with regard to the production and consumption of other commodities, as meat came to be more widely eaten,⁵⁸ and standards of domestic comfort improved. However, perhaps no change was more influential than the shift from bread to ale in restructuring the hinterland of one of medieval Europe's greatest cities.

⁵⁶ Campbell et al., *A Medieval Capital*, pp. 81–82.

⁵⁷ Members of other London companies occur in the records as occasional dealers in grain (*ibid.*, pp. 84–87). Fishmongers were prominent amongst those acquiring licences to ship bulk consignments of wheat: examples can be found in the *Calendar of Close Rolls* and *Calendar of Patent Rolls* (London, various dates); many of these instances relate to years of high grain prices.

⁵⁸ Dyer, 'Changes in Diet', pp. 86, 89.

Making Sense of Medieval Culinary Records: Much Done, But Much More to Do

Constance B. Hieatt

The last decade has seen a remarkable growth of interest in the subject of medieval culinary records and, naturally enough, there has been an enormous number of valuable publications arising from this interest; the extremely limited selection listed in the Appendix ranges from such well-informed and serious books about the food of the period as P.W. Hammond's *Food and Feast in Medieval England*; through various editions, to accumulations of relevant historical records, such as those in C.M. Woolgar's two volumes of *Household Accounts from Medieval England*; and even a new basic research tool, the *Répertoire des manuscrits médiévaux contenant des recettes culinaires*, which contains bibliographical details on all such manuscripts known – before 1992, the year of publication – to those of us who compiled it.

It is about time this kind of information became readily available. Right up to the period in the 1980s when a great deal of new material began to become available, much of what was written about medieval food was just plain wrong, whether because the evidence was misinterpreted or because it was still insufficient in quantity (or, in some cases, quality). Any number of painful instances can be found in William Edward Mead's *The English Medieval Feast*,¹ which was for many years the most valuable source of information about the food of medieval English (and French) aristocrats. But saying that it was the most valuable is tantamount to calling it the best of a bad lot: it is riddled with such misconceptions as that 'practically every dish was smothered in spices' and thus that 'even the best [medieval recipes] contain one or more ingredients repulsive to modern tastes or . . . combined in a fashion that would now make them nauseating in the extreme' (pp. 57 and 55).

It also states as fact such myths as that medieval cooks used spices to disguise the flavour of spoiled meat (p. 77), a myth which is, unfortunately, still current among the general public; and that vegetables were hardly

¹ W.E. Mead, *The English Medieval Feast* (London, 1931; reprinted London and New York, 1967).

eaten at all, at least by the well-to-do (e.g., p. 100). However, there is one thing I can report to Mead's credit: he did *not* perpetrate the misconception common today that medieval diners chewed messily on large bones and threw them around with wild abandon. I presume we owe that one largely to Charles Laughton's memorable film performance as Henry VIII.

Sometimes Mead's misinformation is simply a matter of misinterpreting scanty evidence, as when he says that 'such beverages as brandy, whisky, champagne and gin were quite unknown in medieval times' (p. 48). The *OED* does not, indeed, cite any of these terms in sources prior to the seventeenth century, nor do any of those words appear in the cookery books Mead knew. However, distilled wines (i.e. brandy) are amply documented in such sources as the confectionery collections found in primarily medical manuscripts, and there is one reference to '*ew ardaunt*', one of the medieval terms for distilled spirits, in the fourteenth-century *Forme of Cury*, a source which Mead drew on extensively.

He may, however, have been misled by an error made by one of the early editors of the *Forme of Cury*. Richard Warner, whose edition appeared in 1791, glossed '*ew ardaunt*' as 'hot water', although the recipe concerned is for a pastry castle which was evidently meant to be served dramatically aflame. One shudders to think of the disastrous effects of pouring hot water over a pastry castle. It can be presumed that neither Warner nor Mead had any expertise in kitchen matters.

It may also be culinary ignorance on Mead's part which leads him to state, in the same passage, that 'Macaroni . . . appears to have been wholly lacking on English tables during the period we are studying', when in fact the *Forme of Cury* gives a recipe entitled, in the edition he consulted, '*macrows*'. This is pasta cut in smallish pieces, boiled and served with cheese and butter. In what was probably the first book in English to try to adapt medieval recipes for modern kitchens, Esther B. Aresty at least recognized that this pasta dish was an early version of macaroni,² although I cannot say much for the authenticity of her 'adapted' recipes.

One of the medieval recipes that Mead treats with scorn continues to be a locus of misinformation to this day. That is, gingerbread. Citing the recipe with that title in MS Harleian 279, Mead, after complaining that the names of medieval recipes are often 'misleading', says, 'Gingerbread sounds familiar, but when we learn how it is made we see that the name connotes nothing we have known before . . . This is gingerbread without ginger!' Indeed, that particular recipe *did* leave out the ginger – but no

² Esther B. Aresty, *The Delectable Past* (New York, 1964), p. 22.

doubt by scribal error; there is at least one other similar, and slightly earlier, recipe which makes no such error.³

That is not the only problem we face with medieval ‘gingerbread’. Readers of Chaucer are misled if they assume that the gingerbread enjoyed by Sir Thopas was exactly like the cake you can run up from a mix available at any grocery store nowadays, but the medieval recipes for a spiced cake made of bread crumbs and honey are still recognizably of the same family; as I trust those will agree who have tried the recipe Sharon Butler and I adapted.⁴ The glosses for Sir Thopas’s gingerbread assured readers that that was what was meant in the Skeat and F.N. Robinson editions of Chaucer; but, starting with Baugh’s 1963 edition, the prevailing gloss has become ‘preserved ginger’, which is what the *Chaucer Glossary* (1979) and the *Riverside Chaucer* (1987) tell students is the meaning.

I cannot trace this change back to its origin beyond the fact that this is the meaning of the word given as the ‘apparent’ meaning of ‘early examples’ in the *OED*. But the examples cited there which may (or may not) support this definition are not really references to gingerbread at all; they are simply earlier spellings for ginger. And the recipe in MS Harleian 279, which is obviously not one for preserved ginger, is cited by the *OED* immediately after the quotation from ‘Sir Thopas’; the possible implication of the temporal proximity of the cakelike recipe and the literary reference is not noted.

Culinary historians have long known that the *OED* is not entirely reliable in these matters, but Chaucer editors now seem to have more faith in that dubious definition than I find to be justifiable. However, I must confess that I have probably also been among those giving misleading information on this subject. I wrote, in an article published in 1979, that ‘the delicacy which refreshed Sir Thopas had a flavour which would be quite recognizable to today’s gingerbread fanciers’.⁵ But in the years which have passed since I wrote that remark I have read my way through scores of manuscripts and edited, in part or in whole, around thirty of them: and I now know I was drawing my conclusions on insufficient evidence.

There is overwhelming evidence that the *usual* meaning of ‘gingerbread’ in manuscripts of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries was neither

³ *Curye on Inglysch: English Culinary Manuscripts of the Fourteenth Century (Including the Forme of Cury)*, ed. C.B. Hieatt and S. Butler (London, 1985), pt v, 19 (p. 154.)

⁴ Constance B. Hieatt and Sharon Butler, *Pleyn Delit: Medieval Cookery for Modern Cooks* (Toronto, 1976), no. 122; (2nd edn, 1996), no. 128. The recipe adapted here is taken from BL, MS Harleian 279 – the one Mead scoffed at.

⁵ ‘To boille the chiknes with the marybones’, in *Chaucerian Problems and Perspectives*, ed. E. Vasta and Z.P. Thundy (Notre Dame, Indiana, 1970), p. 160.

preserved ginger nor a cake made with honey and breadcrumbs, although the latter remained popular for some centuries; there is a recipe almost identical to the fourteenth-century version in Martha Washington's eighteenth-century 'American' cookbook.⁶ But the vast majority of medieval recipes with this title are for a chewy but fairly hard candy, a confection resembling toffee, made of nothing more than honey and spices.

I now think it is far more likely that Sir Thopas refreshed himself with candy, rather than anything resembling cake, and the context, re-examined, seems to suggest this strongly; we are told that his 'merry men' brought him sweet wine and mead:

And roial spicerye
Of gyngebreed that was ful fyn,
And lycorys, and eek comyn,
With sugre that is trye.

That is, they brought him two kinds of sweet drinks and three kinds of expensive candy: gingery 'toffee', liquorice and candied cumin seeds. I find the whole passage, thus understood, very funny; it is such a thoroughly childish treat!

It is not surprising that we all know a lot more now than we did fifteen years ago – let alone earlier in the century – given the outpouring of serious published work in the field which I commented on above. The simple statistics here are really remarkable. The following estimates of publication records deal only with recipes recorded in England, although my colleagues interested in the continental records have been far from idle (as the Appendix shows, selective although it most definitely is).

By 1900 around thirteen culinary manuscripts of English provenance, whether Latin, Anglo-Norman or Middle English, had been edited and printed, in whole or in part, including those simply collated. The number of recipes printed from these manuscripts amounts to about 1850. Since 1900 (and almost *all* in the last decade or so), something like twenty-one additional manuscripts have been edited, in whole or in part – not counting those re-edited – giving us around 2075 recipes not previously printed, as well as a great many new (and often corrected) versions of some which

⁶ *Martha Washington's Booke of Cookery*, ed. Karen Hess (New York, 1981), p. 342. As Mrs Hess clearly shows, Martha Washington's 'cookbook' was neither 'American' nor eighteenth-century in its origins. It is all the more interesting in that it gives us a clear demonstration of the persistence of far more ancient recipes right into what we have always considered to be the 'American' culinary heritage.

had been edited before. Obviously, our basic database has more than doubled. Yet it still cannot be said that the field has been adequately covered.

The fact is that there are at least twelve English manuscripts which have never been edited at all; and these manuscripts contain hundreds of recipes. Furthermore, when we add to these completely unpublished collections the unedited recipes in manuscripts which have only been edited or collated in part, and those in unsatisfactory editions which still need re-editing, there remains a total of almost 2000 recipes in need of editorial attention: about as many as have been edited in this century, and more than the total number edited in previous centuries.

We must also remember that, of the 'published' recipes, many have only been 'collated' in editions of parallel recipes; in some cases, these may have significant variants which remain unnoticed, although we can hope that such cases are only a small minority now. In any event, while the job of recording medieval English recipes is surely now more than half done, there is unquestionably still a great deal of work to be done. We must realize that any conclusions based on what appears to be only two-thirds of the presently extant evidence are tentative and subject to further correction as more evidence becomes available.

It is not just the evidence to be found in English culinary manuscripts which can cast new light on medieval English recipes. The *haute cuisine* of western Europe was an international one: with distinctive local variants, of course, but one must often look well beyond national boundaries to explain recipe terminology. Consider, for example, a glossary entry I wrote some time before 1980, on a recipe from a very early source:

EMELES I 46, translating *Emeles* in MS A1. The French name seems to indicate that these cakes are an enriched variety of the *Alumelle frite au sucre* of MP, p. 208, and that the word is thus etymologically related to 'omelet'; note, however, that 'Cyuele', the spelling indicated in l. 5 here, is also used by [MS] L: cf. CB, p. 113.⁷

I soon came to realize this was incorrect. 'Emeles', I discovered, is a spelling for 'almonds' in a fourteenth-century Catalan cookbook,⁸ and almonds – which are not an ingredient of an '*alumelle*' at all – are an

⁷ *Curye on Inglysch*, p. 185; 'CB' refers to *Two Fifteenth-Century Cookery Books*, ed. Thomas Austin (EETS, original series, 91, 1888; reprinted London, 1964), and 'MP' to *Le ménagier de Paris*, ed. Jérôme Pichon (Paris, 1847; reprinted Geneva, n.d.), vol. ii.

⁸ Rudolf Grewe, ed., *Libre de Sent Sofi* (Barcelona, 1979), p. 237.

essential, primary ingredient of the Anglo-Norman (and English) ‘emeles’. Furthermore, it is easy to see how the spelling ‘cyuele’ would have (almost inevitably) arisen from a misreading of ‘emele’; it is often difficult to distinguish between the capital letters *C* and *E* in hands of this period, and an *m*, written with three minims, could easily be read as *iu*. The scribe who substituted *y* for *i* was trying to prevent what he took to be ‘iu’ from being ‘misread’ as ‘m’.

I made this discovery too late to correct the entry in the printed edition, and had to give a revised version in an article in which I corrected a number of erroneous readings in the book;⁹ this was far from being the only one, and if I were redoing that article now I would have to add yet more. If those of us working on early culinary history are ever to be able to call on all the data we need to make well-informed judgements, what we clearly need is a computerized database containing information about the individual recipes included in *all* the known English and European manuscripts, along with dishes mentioned in other sources, notably medical treatises and menus.

For a while, it seemed we were going to get something of the sort from a group based in Paris. A decade or so ago, this group, under the leadership of Professor Jean-Louis Flandrin, announced a database to be undertaken under the general heading of ‘Nommes de plats’ (the titles of recipes), and I was asked to be responsible for the English component. At that time, however, I was busy with other projects, and now that I have considered the matter more closely, I doubt that the methods proposed for use with French materials by the Paris group are adequate for a project of more international scope. They do not work at all well for the English and Scandinavian recipes which I know best.

The information considered minimally essential by those who designed that project consisted of the title of the dish, the document in which it appears and the principal ingredient and general category of the dish.¹⁰ However, I found that grave difficulties arise in handling the titles of English and Scandinavian recipes, difficulties which apparently did not occur to those working primarily with French, Italian and Spanish collections. I suspect this will turn out to be the case with other recipes in Germanic languages.

The principal problems are, first, that later modifications to many

⁹ ‘Further Notes on “The Forme of Cury” et al.’; see the Appendix.

¹⁰ As stated (although I was informed at a later date that this had been somewhat modified) in the programme for a conference held at the University of Montreal in May 1990.

recipes may make them almost unrecognizable; secondly, that a great number of their titles are – like that of ‘emeles’ – borrowed from other languages, and transcribed by scribes whose corruptions of the originals may border on the bizarre; and, thirdly, that we still have a long way to go in establishing the original etymology (and thus, in part, meaning) of many medieval food names. A further problem is the changes in titles which were sometimes made when a recipe was translated from one language into another. One example is the French ‘*brouet houssié*’, which Professor Flandrin has argued in an important and influential article is exclusively French because the French title does not appear in English recipe collections.¹¹

However, when I analysed the contents and procedures involved in this recipe, I found it to be essentially identical to a recipe in several English collections. While the English scribes do not call the dish a ‘*bruet*’, their title is only gradually corrupted otherwise. ‘*Hauseleamye*’ in an Anglo-Norman version becomes ‘*hauceleamye*’ in an early Middle English translation, and ‘*hocchee*’ in *The Forme of Cury*. The key ingredients remain exactly the same: chicken, sauced with sour grapes (the equivalent of the French *verjuice*, which means the juice of sour grapes), and notably garnished with parsley, which is what one medieval authority tells us is meant by ‘*houssié*’.¹²

The French culinary term ‘*houssié*’ is, thus, clearly the ancestor of these strange English names, although I have not found any explanation for the puzzling Anglo-Norman addition ‘*teamye*'.¹³ Presumably later English cooks or scribes didn’t understand it either, since *hauceleamye* was shortened to *hocchee*. Note how misleading a change in title can be if we have not caught other details in the recipes which show them to be more or less identical; there are a number of other cases in which Professor Flandrin was wrong in thinking a ‘French’ dish did not appear in English versions. I believe, therefore, that we need a much more detailed approach to recipes and their titles than was proposed to those of us present at the meeting in Montreal in 1990 (much less what was vaguely circulated a few years earlier).

No computer will be able to enlighten us much unless we provide it with enough information to extract the special characteristics which make a particular dish different from other similar dishes, with enough

¹¹ ‘*Brouets, potages et bouillons*'; see the Appendix.

¹² *Le ménagier de Paris*, ed. Georgine E. Brereton and Janet M. Ferrier (Oxford, 1981), p. 216.

¹³ Nor have any of the Anglo-Normanists I have consulted.

specific information to make it possible to ignore the accidentals and accretions – such as whether *brouet houssé/ hocchee* is thickened, and if so how (bread and/or eggs): a matter which, in this case, is of no importance whatsoever, although the presence or lack of a thickener may be a distinguishing characteristic of certain other dishes.

Must we, then, record the entire recipe? This is the approach taken by Terence Scully, who reported in 1993 that he has recorded hundreds of entire medieval recipes – in fact, entire collections – in a database, apparently by simply using a scanner on them.¹⁴ Yet, while Scully said he had now recorded ‘all known collections’ of such recipes, he did not state explicitly that he had used this technique on materials existing only in unprinted manuscripts. Therein, for anyone concerned with English materials, lies the obvious difficulty, considering that a substantial proportion of the manuscripts containing *English* recipes remains unedited.

I have some microfilms of manuscripts I cannot decipher at all, on a microfilm reader or in photocopies; how could a scanner help in a case where I know I will never be able to read this manuscript unless I can find the time and money to visit the library which holds it? Some are so difficult that even studying the original under ultra-violet light does not resolve all problems. If I were to try to enter complete recipes in all cases, the chore would no doubt take up more years than I have left. Sometimes it can take me several days of brooding and checking various references before I can be reasonably sure I have correctly deciphered a single recipe.

While Professor Scully’s database may eventually be able to lend itself to far wider uses than any more selective method of collecting information, I fear his procedure is not practicable if we are to achieve a complete record of the *English* manuscripts in anything like the next twenty years or so. I therefore propose to transcribe more limited entries, which, if the details included are chosen and classified carefully, could give us a foundation for the kind of analysis I am urging. Fortunately, a record of all the recipes in the corpus in their entirety is not really necessary, since large parts of identifiable collections with a common source are found in multiple versions with little variation in the essential details.

There are, for example, at least eight collections representing or drawing extensively on *The Forme of Cury*, and a number of other collections

¹⁴ A paper delivered at the Kalamazoo Medieval Institute that year, and not, as far as I know, subsequently published. My information is limited to the oral paper and a report from another scholar who had talked to Scully about his methods.

where smaller groups of virtually unchanged recipes from this source can be identified. Such recipes can be noted briefly as variants, as long as they are examined with a careful eye to what may turn out to be *significant* variants, which may change our understanding of individual recipes or related groups. This was, for example, the case with my earlier discovery that the *Forme of Cury* fritter recipe called ‘nysebek’, which appeared to be an odd mixture of sorrel and flour, was actually a miscopied version of an older recipe called ‘mistembec’, named for the funnel through which the batter was poured and consisting of a simple mixture of flour leavened with sourdough.

My idea of a useful way to describe a recipe which will include all necessary details but not take an undue amount of time to draw up has been deeply influenced by consultations with other scholars in the field. It is still only tentative: I am now in touch with an expert on computers (and databases) who may considerably modify my proposals. It seems clear, however, that certain basic information about the recipe and the manuscript in which it appears must come first. It also seems obvious that ‘main ingredients’ must be handled with care: you cannot simply categorize a dish as using ‘chicken’ as against, say, ‘meat’ or ‘fish’. Not only did many popular dishes have ‘fast day’ versions, substituting fish (or cheese or fruit) for the ‘main ingredient’ used on a day when flesh meat was permitted, but also many recipes routinely suggest alternative substitutions in more or less the same category. *Brouet houssié* typically calls for chicken or veal.

I propose to handle this situation by initially classifying a dish as falling into one of four large groups, dividing ‘principal ingredients’ into Meats (including poultry), Fish, Vegetable (including fruits), and Dairy (including eggs). When a recipe has one or more alternative versions, each would have a separate listing – for example, ‘*blancmanger*’ using poultry might be one listing, and ‘*blancmanger* of fish’ a separate entry. But it is also necessary to list the minor ingredients: some dishes are distinguished as a group by their seasonings or garnishes, as is the case with what I have noted is distinguished by the use of verjuice (or sour grapes) and parsley.

Placing a recipe into a category describing in general what type of dish it is can also be useful, but here we get onto ground where it may be difficult to make distinctions which are valid in more than one country. The pioneers in France started with the categories used in medieval French cookery books and menus; I, on the other hand, started with those used in England, which were often very different and, when we stopped to consider the matter, often inconsistent.

A modern cookbook generally sorts foods into categories which depend on the order in which we customarily serve them. So did many medieval collections; but since that order is not necessarily the same, it is apt to be very confusing for modern students of the subject. A typical twentieth-century cookbook begins with ‘appetizers’ (or ‘hors d’oeuvres’, or ‘canapés’, or something of the sort), then progresses through ‘soups’, ‘meat’, etc., to ‘desserts’ and (usually finally) ‘confections’. But, when we look at a medieval cookbook, the logic of the groupings may elude us.

Neither French nor English medieval culinary manuscripts start with hors d’oeuvres; although many French menus suggest that formal meals in France began with just such delicate titbits, the major French recipe collections invariably group such dishes at the *end* of the collection, under the general rubric of ‘entremets’, along with the delicacies which were served at the end of the meal. ‘Entremets’ usually resemble the special delicacies and ‘subtleties’ which also make up the final course of a medieval English festive meal; such recipes also usually come at the end of a medieval English recipe collection.

The sweets and tiny confections which often followed the meal proper are not usually found in culinary recipe collections at all, for the simple reason that they were likely to be purchased from a professional confectioner rather than made in the manor house (or palace) kitchen. Note that the dishes which the recipe collections, as well as the menus, indicate were to be served in the final course were not necessarily sweet, as our ‘desserts’ are: while many of them were sweetened, or served with a dusting of sugar, they were not always noticeably sweeter than some of the dishes customarily served earlier in the menu. The medieval rationale was, simply, that they were special treats, and thus came later, whether or not they were ‘sweet’. The headnote to *The Forme of Cury* declares ‘First it teachip man for to make commune potages and commune metis for howshold . . . [and] afterward it techip for to make curious potages & meetes and sotiltees’.¹⁵

On these broad divisions, between the ‘common’ and the ‘curious’, English and French collections – at least, those which take care to make the rationale of their order clear – are agreed. But when it comes to smaller subdivisions, they part ways. For example, French collections often make distinctions between thickened and unthickened pottages, which no English collection sorts into separate groups; and, while English recipes often specify that a particular pottage must be ‘chargeant’ or ‘standing’, thick, or, on the contrary, ‘running’, thin, neither of these categories

¹⁵ *Curye on Inglisch*, p. 20.

is necessarily unthickened. A ‘running’ pottage is usually one that is only moderately thick, like a modern cream soup, whereas a ‘standing’ pottage is one that is thickened to the consistency of a thick porridge.¹⁶

On the other hand, the delicacies which come at or towards the end of the meal which are generally grouped together as ‘*entremets*’ in French collections are in England often consigned to separate categories entitled ‘lechemetes’ (foods served in slices) and ‘fried metes’ (such as fritters). None of this is necessarily consistent with menu designations. A dish which an English menu calls a ‘pottage’ may be listed in a contemporary cookery book as a ‘*lechemete*’: and indeed if a ‘pottage’ is basically something boiled in a pot, it is a pottage. Or started out to be one; some end up as grilled dishes, too.

If we are to agree on a category classification that will suit both English and continental examples, we may have to adhere to the method of cooking as a guide; this would allow me to categorize ‘furmenty’ – which is grouped with humble vegetable pottages in England but classified as an ‘*entremet*’ in some French collections – as a pottage without offence to French researchers. Yet even if we put a pottage which, when cold, is sliced and grilled in a separate category, that still leaves us with a vast number in the ‘pottage’ group, and researchers must be able to see the characteristics of a particular pottage.

This means that we must be meticulous in recording such specifications as ‘make it standing’ as part of the record for an individual recipe, just as we must include all ingredients, including garnishes. While I do not think we really must record the entire recipe, there is one part of it which should indeed be recorded verbatim, just as it appears in the manuscript. This is the first line or so of the recipe, or around a dozen words.

That is usually enough to make it possible for a researcher who compares it with a recipe recorded in another manuscript to determine whether it is – at least, in its beginning – substantially the *same* recipe. When recipes in different manuscripts clearly are the same, they belong to what I term the same ‘family’ group of recipes: for example, the family of *The Forme of Cury* or of *Le viandier de Taillevent*. Most of the recipes in English manuscripts can be traced to one source collection or another, and I am sure many French recipes could also be classified in ‘family’ groups, with a considerable gain in our understanding of the history of particular recipes.

¹⁶ Or even thicker: ‘jellies’ are often categorized as ‘a potage called gelee’ in the menus of the period.

Ten English families can be identified, most of which draw on earlier ones. I thus propose to include in a recipe description the family to which it belongs, or from which it descends, if this can be identified, as well as the opening clause(s). With this information, it is often unnecessary to give full details other than ways in which the particular example differs: readers can be referred to the prototype.

Here, then, is the information I propose to record for each recipe:

- Line 1 MS title; author (if known); approximate date.
- Line 2 Name of recipe as it appears here; folio on which it begins; number in this collection.
- Line 3 Normalized spelling of recipe name; recipe category, 'principle ingredient' category; recipe 'family' if identified.
- Line 4 First line or so of recipe – which will usually be enough to characterize this particular version and to locate it in its family group if that is not yet known.
- Line 5 Ingredients, in order called for, with semi-colons separating groups required at different stages of cooking.
- Line 6 Cooking procedures; semi-colons to correspond to stages indicated in the ingredient list.
- Line 7 Characteristics of this particular recipe not already noted.

Of course, some of the information demanded on a line of the entry does not always exist: for example, folio number for a collection in a scroll with no such numbers. When no guess or explanation can be hazarded, an item (such as the name of an anonymous author) will simply be passed by.

As examples of how this might work, here are three recipes for a dish called 'mawmenny':

1

- 1 BL, MS Add. 46919; c. 1325
- 2 Maumenee; 19r; 7
- 3 Mawmenny; PO, M; 2
- 4 Wyn; braun of chapoun ipollo al to poudre, & soppen do þrym
- 5 Wine, dark meat of capon, ground almonds, clove powder; fried almonds, ground 'gret vlehs' [beef?], sugar; indigo colouring [?] ¹⁷
- 6 Boil
- 7 Sugar to 'abaten þe streynþe' of the spicing

¹⁷ Two people who had actually cooked using this recipe told me they did not need to add any colouring: the colour produced by this combination of ingredients turned out to be lavender, which is close enough to the colour of indigo. Note, however, that several other medieval recipes call specifically for indigo as a food colouring. I do not know whether indigo would be considered fit for human consumption today.

2

- 1 Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Douce 257; 1381
- 2 Maumene; 89r; 30
- 3 Mawmenny; PO, M; 4 (< 2?)
- 4 Tak þe þyys oper þe flesch of þe capony. Seþe hem and kerf
- 5 Capon meat; almond milk, beef broth, ground rice or wastell bread, egg yolks, saffron; cloves, 'galentyn' powder
- 6 Boil, grind; mix (and simmer); garnish
- 7 Dark or white meat; very thick: 'charchant'

3

- 1 BL, MS Add. 5016; c. 1420
- 2 Mawmenny; roll; 194
- 3 Mawmenny; PO, M; 4
- 4 Take þe chese and of flessch of capouns or of hennes and hakke
- 5 Capon or hen meat; almond milk, beef or other meat broth; rice flour or crumbs or wheat starch (rest as in recipe 2 above)
- 6 Chop and grind; mix and simmer; thicken; garnish
- 7 Preliminary cooking omitted; 'thighs' miscopied as 'cheese'

The first of these, dating from very early in the fourteenth century, translates an Anglo-Norman recipe of the late thirteenth; the second is from the later fourteenth century and the last from the early fifteenth century. Like almost all English collections, these are anonymous, so no authors appear, and the last is a scroll, which is not divided into folios.

All three of these are vaguely related, but note that the second is not at all the 'same' as the first: the wording is entirely different, and the ingredients differ just enough to matter. Instead of ground beef, which never again appears in any English 'mawmenny' recipe, we are told to use beef broth or some other meat broth and a thickening of rice flour or breadcrumbs. The whole almonds have disappeared. The dish is no longer to be coloured indigo blue (or lavender), an idea which was just as exotic then as it would be now, but is simply to be saffron yellow, a commonplace colouring in the period. Egg yolks creep in – not so much as a thickening agent but, the recipe says, to help, along with the saffron, to make the dish 'yellow'. And the cloves are supplemented with 'galentyn' powder – which may mean the spice galingale.

The third recipe, on the other hand, is 'the same' as the second, although not an exact duplicate: more alternatives appear in the list

of ingredients, which is normal for a later copy – the later the copy, the more elaborated it is apt to be. But one difference should have caught the eye at once. Here ‘chese’ makes a unique and startling appearance as a prime ingredient in a dish well known, and lacking cheese, elsewhere. Had cheese crept in as a substitute ingredient in the fifteenth century?

No indeed! As my last line indicates, this is a scribal error for ‘thighs’: that is, dark meat of the capon, possibly spelled ‘thees’ in the exemplar here miscopied. As anyone who has looked at medieval manuscripts knows, it is easy to misread *t* as *c* in many scribal hands. That this is the case here is clear only because the recipe is easily identified as the same as that in MS Douce 257, in recipe 2 above. You can see that this is so because it begins the same way, with one omission; contains the same ingredients – plus a few alternatives; and follows the same procedures, except omitting directions for first cooking the capon meat. Anyone who looks at the rest of the recipe will see that it follows the original wording very closely.¹⁸

It is, therefore, quite improbable that any cook ever actually added cheese to the ‘mawmenny’. This shows how vital it may be to establish the recipe’s ancestry, which can give important clues when something went wrong in the transmission. A culinary historian who looked at that third mawmenny recipe without realizing its relationship to the one above might well reach an entirely wrong conclusion; as, indeed, Esther Aresty did when she chose that recipe for a modern adaptation.¹⁹

Incidentally, some may be surprised to hear that ‘mawmenny’ is not a dish of French origin – there is, in fact, no known French example of the dish – but one adapted in Italy and England from an Arabic source. Inevitably, the Italian and English versions of the dish are very different from the original Arabic *ma’mūniya*, which was often simply a fat-enriched porridge.²⁰

¹⁸ All three recipes are printed in *Curye on Inghysch*: see pp. 45, 68 and 144.

¹⁹ Aresty, *The Delectable Past*, pp. 23–24.

²⁰ The most illuminating discussion of the history of this dish is Maxime Rodinson’s essay ‘La Ma’mūniyat en Orient et en Occident’, originally published in *Etudes d’Orientalisme dédiées à la mémoire de Lévi-Provençal* (Paris, 1962), trans. by Barbara Inskip as ‘Ma’mūniya East and West’, in *Petits propos culinaires*, 33 (1989), pp. 15–25. Professor Rodinson included a number of recipes; those closest to medieval Italian and English versions call for rice, milk and breast meat of chickens, sometimes garnished with pistachios – for which the whole almonds in the Anglo-Norman version were probably a substitute.

It is clear, therefore, that the culinary historian's frame of reference has to be a wide one. In this essay I have cited French, Catalan, Arabic and (obliquely) Scandinavian examples. This rather daunting situation may explain, in part, my relatively isolated position in attempting to complete the record of medieval English culinary manuscripts. I would be only too delighted to welcome more recruits to the field to help in what sometimes looks like an impossible mountain of work.

Appendix

Some Important Recent Publications on Medieval Food

- [Anglo-Norman MSS] 'Two Anglo-Norman Culinary Collections', ed. C.B. Hieatt and R.F. Jones, *Speculum*, 61 (1986), pp. 859–82.
- Anonimo meridionale, *Due libri di cucina*, ed. I. Boström (Stockholm, 1985).
- Jean de Bockenheim, 'Registre de cuisine', ed. B. Lauroux, *Mélanges de l'école française de Rome*, 100 (1988), pp. 709–60.
- 'Maistre' Chiquart, 'Du fait de cuisine', ed. T. Scully, *Valesia* 40 (1985), pp. 101–231; trans. Scully (New York and Bern, 1986).
- Curye on Inglysch: English Culinary Manuscripts of the Fourteenth Century (Including the Forme of Cury)*, ed. C.B. Hieatt and S. Butler (London, 1985).
- J.-L. Flandrin, 'Brouets, potages et bouillons', *Médiévales*, 5 (1983), pp. 5–14.
- R. Grewe, ed., 'An Early Thirteenth-Century Northern-European Cookbook', *Current Research*, 1986, pp. 27–45 (conference proceedings; Culinary Historians of Boston, for 1985).
- Ann Hagen, *A Handbook of Anglo-Saxon Food: Processing and Consumption* (Pinner, Middlesex, 1992).
- , *A Second Handbook of Anglo-Saxon Food and Drink: Production and Distribution* (Pinner, Middlesex, 1995).
- P.W. Hammond, *Food and Feast in Medieval England* (Stroud, Gloucestershire, 1993).
- C.B. Hieatt, 'Further Notes on *The Forme of Cury* et al.: Additions and Corrections', *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester*, 70 (1988), pp. 45–52.
- , 'The Middle English Culinary Recipes in MS Harley 5401: An Edition and Commentary', *Medium aevum*, 65 (1996), pp. 54–71.
- D. Menjot, ed., *Manger et boire au moyen âge*, 2 vols (Paris, 1984).
- An Ordinance of Pottage: An Edition of the Fifteenth-Century Culinary Recipes in Yale University's MS Beinecke 163*, ed. C.B. Hieatt (London, 1988).
- Le Recueil de Riom*, ed. C. Lambert (Montreal, 1988).
- 'Répertoire des manuscrits médiévaux contenant des recettes culinaires', ed. C.B. Hieatt, C. Lambert, B. Lauroux and A. Prentki, in *Du manuscrit à la table*, ed. C. Lambert (Montreal, 1992), pp. 315–88.
- Terence Scully, *The Art of Cookery in the Middle Ages* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, and Rochester, New York, 1995).
- Le viandier de Taillevent*, ed. T. Scully (Ottawa, 1988).
- C.M. Woolgar, *Household Accounts from Medieval England*, 2 vols (Oxford, 1992–93).

Feeding Medieval Cities: Some Historical Approaches

Margaret Murphy

It has been recognized for some time that the issue of urban provisioning is central to our understanding of the role of urban centres in the processes of economic development.¹ However, when Roger Scola's book on Manchester, *Feeding the Victorian City*, appeared in 1992, its editors claimed (with some justification) that it represented the first book-length study of the supply of food to, and its distribution in, a major city.² Although in recent years historians have turned their attention to the question of how medieval towns and cities were provisioned and the effect of their demands upon their regions, there is still a notable absence of large-scale studies of particular places.³

In the modern period the supply zones of large cities have widened to national and international scope, presenting the historian with an almost impossible task in getting to grips with the source material. Scola indeed acknowledged that he had been forced to abandon several aspects of his provisioning study, most notably an examination of the response of food producers across an ever-widening area of supply to the demands

¹ See, e.g., E.A. Wrigley, 'A Simple Model of London's Importance in Changing English Society and Economy, 1650–1750', *Past and Present*, 37 (1967), pp. 44–70; P. Bairoch, *Cities and Economic Development from the Dawn of History to the Present* (Chicago, 1988).

² Roger Scola, *Feeding the Victorian City: The Food Supply of Manchester, 1770–1870* (Manchester, 1992), p. xix.

³ Recent works on medieval English towns contain much useful material on provisioning. See for example R. Britnell, *Growth and Decline in Colchester, 1300–1525* (Cambridge, 1986); M. Kowaleski, *Local Markets and Regional Trade in Medieval Exeter* (Cambridge, 1995). For European towns see *L'approvisionnement des villes de l'Europe occidentale au moyen âge et aux temps moderns* (Cinquièmes journées internationales d'histoire, 1985; Auch, Centre culturel de l'abbaye de Flaran), especially the papers by P. Wolff, C.M. de la Roncière, R. Van Uytven and F. Irsigler. A group of eight papers which examine aspects of the provisioning of London and Paris in the middle ages has been published as a special number of *Franco-British Studies*, 20 (1995). For an exemplary study of a modern city's role in shaping the landscape and economy of its region, as well as channelling the production of an extensive geographical area, see W. Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York and London, 1991).

of the growing city.⁴ In the medieval period the supply zone of most basic consumables to cities was much more constrained, thereby permitting, in theory at least, a more manageable study to be undertaken. However, the surviving evidence comes from a wide variety of sources and requires expertise in many areas. The subject is best undertaken by a team of researchers who can bring a number of different approaches to the topic.

This essay presents and discusses some of the historical approaches which have recently been applied to the subject of provisioning the capital of England in the fourteenth century. It is based upon research undertaken as part of the 'Feeding the City' project in the Centre for Metropolitan History in London and seeks to introduce and summarize some of the principal findings of this research, as well as considering whether the methodology might have a wider applicability. This project was set up in 1988 in order to investigate the supply of food, fuel and building materials to medieval London and to study the impact of the city's demands on the agricultural and distributive systems of its hinterland.⁵ The first phase of the project focused on the period c. 1300, when the population of London reached its medieval peak. Further funding allowed a second phase of work to be undertaken, this time focusing on the post-Black Death capital, whose reduced population generated smaller aggregate demands but more diverse ones. This collaborative research project brought together urban and rural historians and historical geographers in an in-depth investigation of one of the most crucial aspects of the relationship between town and country. It marks the beginning of systematic study of the impact which the demands of medieval London had on its agricultural region.⁶

The historical approaches applied by the project can be divided into

⁴ Scola, *Feeding the Victorian City*, p. 3.

⁵ Feeding the City I, co-directed by Derek Keene (Centre for Metropolitan History) and Bruce Campbell (Queens University, Belfast) was funded by the Leverhulme Trust; Feeding the City II, co-directed by Derek Keene, Bruce Campbell, James Galloway and Margaret Murphy, has been funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (grant number R000233157). For an introduction to the aims and some preliminary findings of the project see J.A. Galloway and M. Murphy, 'Feeding the City: Medieval London and its Agrarian Hinterland', *The London Journal*, 16 (1991), pp. 3–14. I would like to thank Jim Galloway and Derek Keene for their helpful comments on this present essay.

⁶ There have, however, been many useful surveys of London's food-supply region during the early modern period: J. Chartres, 'Food Consumption and Internal Trade', in A.L. Beier and R. Finlay, eds, *London 1500–1700: The Making of the Metropolis* (1986), pp. 168–96; A. Everitt, 'The Marketing of Agricultural Produce', in J. Thirsk, ed., *The Agrarian History of England and Wales*, iv, 1500–1640 (Cambridge, 1984), pp. 466–92; F.J. Fisher, 'The Development of the London Food Market, 1540–1640', in E.M. Carus-Wilson, ed., *Essays in Economic History* (1954), pp. 135–51.

three principal groups: those concerned with reconstructing the requirements of the medieval city; those concerned with the production of basic foodstuffs in the countryside and the development of regional specialisms; and those concerned with the systems of distribution by which produce was transferred from the rural producer to the urban consumer.

London achieved the position of England's largest and wealthiest town as early as the tenth century. In 1100 perhaps one in one hundred English people lived in the capital and by 1300 the figure was one in seventy or less while the city may have contained 2 per cent of the national wealth.⁷ Research published during the last decade has resulted in an upward revision of the estimated populations of several medieval English towns and cities.⁸ It is now believed that c. 1300 the population of London was between 80,000 and 100,000, and fell to around 50,000 in the post-Black Death period.⁹

Not only was London's population very large, it was also extremely varied in socio-economic terms. The city contained disproportionate numbers of both the richest and poorest of England's inhabitants. Most of the richest magnates of the day had London houses where they spent some of the year. The city was full of ecclesiastical establishments, large and small, and many bishops and abbots followed the example of the nobility and had metropolitan residences.¹⁰ The households of these lay and ecclesiastical nobles could spend up to half of their considerable incomes on food.¹¹ Furthermore, London had a large class of well-off merchants, some with incomes which placed them in positions of equality with the nobility, as well as many wealthy individuals who derived their incomes from office holding or legal practice.¹² There were also smaller traders, artisans and wage-earners big and small. Under them were the 'marginals', the huge mass of poor, often destitute, frequently

⁷ D. Keene, 'London, circa 600–1300: The Growth of a Capital', *Franco-British Studies*, 17 (1994), p. 25.

⁸ D. Keene, *Survey of Medieval Winchester*, Winchester Studies 2 (Oxford, 1985); E. Rutledge, 'Immigration and Population Growth in Early Fourteenth-Century Norwich: Evidence from the Tithe Roll', *Urban History Yearbook* 1988 (1988), pp. 15–30.

⁹ D. Keene, 'A New Study of London Before the Great Fire', *Urban History Yearbook* 1984 (1984), pp. 11–21.

¹⁰ C. Barron, 'Centres of Conspicuous Consumption: The Aristocratic Town House in London, 1200–1500', *London Journal*, 20 (1995), pp. 1–16.

¹¹ C. Dyer, *Standards of Living in the Later Middle Ages: Social Change in England, c. 1200–1520* (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 55–67.

¹² Ibid., pp. 110–26; S.L. Thrupp, *The Merchant Class of Medieval London* (reprinted, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1989), pp. 108–30.

homeless Londoners. Then as now poor people flocked to the city in search of jobs, a better life and charitable hand-outs. By the mid thirteenth century London contained large numbers of poor. Henry III in 1244 made provision for 20,000 meals to be distributed to the poor in Westminster and 15,000 at St Paul's.¹³ By 1300 it is likely that London contained an even greater number of poverty-stricken inhabitants.

The consumption needs of the capital were therefore not only large in scale but very diverse. The richest people required luxury items and consumed large amounts of fresh meat and fish. During the months of July and August 1302 the royal household spent £1454 on food (more than half of that sum on meat alone) in London and its immediate region.¹⁴ Fresh meat and fish were beyond the normal reach of less well-off Londoners but they could afford poultry, salt- and stock-fish, dairy produce, vegetables, legumes and fruit. Most importantly, however, all classes required grains for their basic bread and ale. Studies have shown that, while the number of calories consumed per capita varied greatly between social groups, grains provided the most substantial proportion of the daily nutritional needs of rich and poor alike.¹⁵

This dependence on grain calories in pre-industrial towns explains why many provisioning studies have been dominated by the examination of grain supply. The first major work produced by the Feeding the City project concentrated on London's grain supply c. 1300.¹⁶ In this work the project evolved a methodology for estimating the aggregate demand for grain generated by a city of London's size in this period. This began with an estimate of a daily per capita nutritional intake

¹³ R.C. Stacey, *Politics, Policy and Finance under Henry III, 1216–1245* (Oxford, 1987), p. 240.

¹⁴ D. Keene, 'Medieval London and its Region', *London Journal*, 14 (1989), p. 102.

¹⁵ A study based on the estimates of food supplies needed for soldiers garrisoning English castles in Scotland at the beginning of the fourteenth century revealed a diet in which 78 per cent of calorific intake was provided by grains in the form of bread, ale and oatmeal flour: M. Prestwich, 'Victualling Estimates for English Garrisons in Scotland during the Early Fourteenth Century', *English Historical Review*, 82 (1967), pp. 536–43. Christopher Dyer's work on the diets of harvest workers confirms the predominance of grains with bread and ale supplying up to 80 per cent of dietary calories, c. 1300: C. Dyer, 'Changes in Diet in the Late Middle Ages: The Case of Harvest Workers', *Agricultural History Review*, 36 (1988), pp. 21–37. A study of the diet of the English lay nobility indicates that bread, ale, pasties and pastries probably accounted for 65–70 per cent of per capita calories consumed: J.M. Thurgood, 'The Diet and Domestic Households of the English Lay Nobility, 1265–1531' (unpublished M.Phil. thesis, University of London, 1982).

¹⁶ B.M.S. Campbell, J.A. Galloway, D. Keene and M. Murphy, *A Medieval Capital and its Grain Supply: Agrarian Production and Distribution in the London Region, c. 1300*, *Historical Geography Research Series*, 30 (1993).

necessary to sustain life, based on the work of nutritionists (2000–2500 kilocalories). It was then assumed that between 60 and 75 per cent of these daily calories were supplied by grain in the form of bread and ale.¹⁷ The next step involved calculating the quantity of raw grain which would be needed to provide the requisite number of daily calories, building in an element for the fodder requirements of animals used to bring grain overland to the city, as well as allowing for calorie loss arising from the processes of milling, malting, baking and brewing. A range of estimates was therefore produced from this admittedly approximate exercise. For the purposes of further calculation a mean annual figure of 1.65 quarters of grain per capita was taken, leading to the conclusion that London, with a population of 80,000 persons, would have required 132,000 quarters of grain each year. In the latter half of the fourteenth century, when the population of London fell to around 50,000, the aggregate grain requirement also fell. However, the rise in living standards, which occasioned an increase in ale consumption, had the effect of raising the per capita consumption of grains, so that overall demand did not fall by as much as the population figures would suggest.¹⁸

A different methodology has been applied to estimating the quantities of firewood needed to supply London in the fourteenth century.¹⁹ The medieval city generated an enormous demand for both domestic and industrial fuel. In this period, although other fuels such as charcoal and coal were available, wood was by far the most important source of energy. There are no contemporary records of total quantities of fuel consumed by London and, unlike with grain, it is virtually impossible to calculate an average per capita fuel requirement which would incorporate general domestic heating and cooking needs as well as the fuel consumed by industry. It was therefore necessary in the case of fuel to draw on evidence concerning a later period, specifically the annual per capita coal consumption figure of 0.75 tons estimated for London in 1600.²⁰ The quantities of coal had first to be converted into a dry wood equivalent,

¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 32–36. It was assumed that each Londoner consumed 1600–2000 grain-derived kilocalories a day, of which ale comprised 160–200 kilocalories.

¹⁸ James A. Galloway, 'London's Grain Supply: Changes in Production, Distribution and Consumption during the Fourteenth Century', *Franco-British Studies*, 20 (1995), pp. 23–34.

¹⁹ J. Galloway, D. Keene and M. Murphy, 'Fuelling the City: Production and Distribution of Firewood and Fuel in London's Region, 1290–1400', *Economic History Review*, 49 (1996), pp. 447–72. See also Margaret Murphy, 'The Fuel Supply of Medieval London, 1300–1400', *Franco-British Studies*, 20 (1995) pp. 85–96.

²⁰ J. Hatcher, *The History of the British Coal Industry*, i, *Before 1700: Towards the Age of Coal* (Oxford, 1993), p. 41.

an exercise which resulted in the figure of 1.76 tons of firewood required by each Londoner each year. On that basis it was estimated that London would have consumed 141,000 tons of wood per annum in 1300, with a postulated population of 80,000, and 88,000 tons per annum in 1400 when the population may have been 50,000. As with grain, the rise in living standards which followed the Black Death resulted in a rise in individual demand for fuel both for cooking (including baking and brewing) and domestic heating.²¹

Reasonable estimates of the city's demand for other products, such as meat, fish and dairy produce, have yet to be postulated and, if the exercise is possible, different methodologies again may have to be employed. Dietary evidence suggests that in the early fourteenth century meat and fish were largely absent from the tables of the poor, while persons in wealthy or aristocratic households could consume two to three pounds of meat and fish per day.²² The situation was not static and in the later fourteenth century there was a marked increase in meat consumption among the less well-off. A very wide range of animals and fish, both fresh and preserved, was available for purchase in fourteenth-century London. Some impression of the relative importance of various products in the metropolitan diet at different periods might be gained by analysing the numbers, wealth and influence of the occupational groups involved in particular victualling trades. This approach, among others, will be explored in future research.

In the medieval period most cities relied on their agrarian hinterlands for the supply of basic foodstuffs (in addition to fuel for cooking and heating, timber for building, cloth for clothing and raw materials for industry). Without a regular source of these necessities, concentrations of urban population could not survive. In order for towns and cities to grow, rural hinterlands had to be capable of increasing supplies either by more efficient and productive farming methods or better transport networks allowing further-flung areas to enter the city's supply zone.

The diet of most urban dwellers was to a large extent dictated by what the countryside could efficiently produce. At the most basic level, therefore, examining broad patterns of land-use and the range of crops grown and animals reared in a city's hinterland is an excellent first step in the construction of a picture of urban food supply and also in the analysis of rural response to the challenge of provisioning a major

²¹ Dyer, *Standards of Living*, p. 177.

²² Thurgood, 'Diet and Domestic Households'; Dyer, *Standards of Living*, pp. 58–62.

concentration of non-rural population. The Feeding the City project has undertaken such a study of land-use and agricultural practices in ten counties in south-east England (Figure 4)

The study area defined by the project was not intended to represent the limits of the London agrarian region. In its demand for food and other supplies London exerted influence upon a series of overlapping regions, some extending a few miles from the city, others taking in much of the country. The ten counties chosen for study were considered to form an area sufficiently compact to enable detailed work to be carried out, yet large enough to contain regions with contrasting soils, topography, differential access to marketing and transport networks, and distinctive agrarian regimes.

The surviving source materials which permit the reconstruction of agrarian practices in medieval England are quite unparalleled and for the period around 1300 are particularly rich. The two principal sources used in the Feeding the City project are inquisition *post mortem* extents

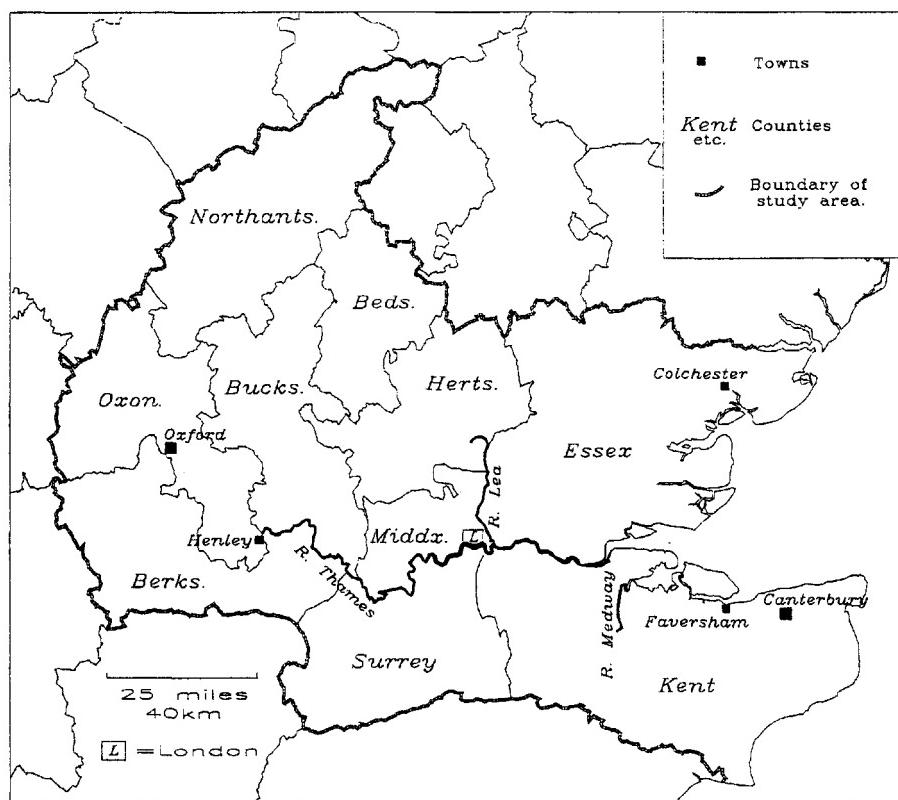


Figure 4: The 'Feeding the City' project study area.

(hereafter IPMs) and annual demesne account rolls. Both sources relate to demesne lands held by lay or ecclesiastical lords and do not directly reveal the agricultural practices of small landowners and peasants who cultivated approximately two-thirds of all arable land.²³ However, it is assumed that agrarian patterns identified within the demesne sector may be taken as broadly diagnostic of the rural economy as a whole.

IPM extents relate to the holdings of deceased, lay, tenants in chief of the crown and record the amount and value of the principal land types and other resources of each of the lord's holdings (typically, but not invariably, a manor). They quantify the arable, pasture, meadow and woodland and assign a value to each acre as well as recording the presence of mills, fishponds, dovecotes and vegetable gardens. During the two stages of the project data have been collected from just over 2100 IPM extents relating to manors and holdings in the study area.²⁴

The second source used by the project is the demesne account roll, which again survives in greatest numbers from the fourteenth century. These accounts, rendered annually by manorial bailiffs, provide in more or less standardized form highly detailed information on most aspects of agricultural practice, acreage under different crops, crop yields, disposal of crops by sale, transfer to household for consumption or use by the manorial workforce. Data are given concerning each livestock type kept on the manor, numbers of males and females, births, deaths and slaughters. Over 800 annual account rolls have been used in the two stages of the project.²⁵

Analysis of the data from both IPM extents and demesne accounts has allowed a detailed picture of land use over a wide area to be built up, in the course of which some previously held assumptions have been given firm statistical backing. For example, given the medieval population's overwhelming reliance on grain-based calories, it has always been appreciated that in most parts of medieval England, arable was the most important

²³ Campbell, Galloway, Keene and Murphy, *A Medieval Capital*, p. 17.

²⁴ Two databases have been compiled from the IPM extents. FTCI IPM database uses 1966 extents from the period 1270–1339, and FTCII IPM database uses 168 extents and relates to the period 1350–80. Towards the end of the fourteenth century the extents change in format and no longer include detailed land-use information. For a discussion of the methodology employed in analysing the extents see B.M.S. Campbell, J.A. Galloway and M. Murphy, 'Rural Land-Use in the Metropolitan Hinterland, 1270–1339: The Evidence of *Inquisitiones Post Mortem*', *Agricultural History Review*, 40 (1992), pp. 1–22.

²⁵ Again the data have been organized into two databases. The FTCI accounts database uses 461 accounts for 204 manors during the period 1290–1315, and the FTCII accounts database uses 360 accounts for 141 manors during the period 1375–1400.

land use. The statistics generated from analysis of the IPM material suggested in fact that as much as 75 per cent of agricultural land in the London region lay under the plough c. 1300, reflecting the impact of concentrated urban demand in addition to the needs of a densely-populated countryside.

Demesne account rolls can be used to show how the arable land was divided between cultivation of bread grains, brewing grains, fodder grains and legumes. Patterns in the cultivation of different arable crops can frequently be linked to the varied demands of the metropolitan market. The city's agrarian hinterland did not of course have uniform soils and terrain and the choice of which crop to grow was also influenced by environmental patterns. However, the patterns of arable farming which have emerged as a result of the study of London's hinterland clearly show that the demands of a large city could profoundly influence the choice of crop grown, in some cases overriding environmental factors, in other cases encouraging an environmental predisposition.²⁶ The significant increase in the cultivation of brewing grains in parts of the London region in the later fourteenth century is a good example of this feature.²⁷

Spatial analysis of grain cultivation has led to the revision of some traditional views about the medieval diet. One of these is that in south-east England, and particularly in London, wheaten bread was almost universally consumed by the fourteenth century, and therefore that, in these areas, there was little demand for the cheaper bread made from rye and mixtures of rye and wheat known as maslin and mancorn.²⁸ The discovery that a significant cluster of manors close to the metropolis and strung out along the navigable River Thames devoted sizeable acreages to rye and maslin cultivation suggests that, in fact, the early fourteenth-century city generated a substantial demand for these cheaper bread grains. This combination of land-use data with evidence from London sources leads to the conclusion that, at its medieval population peak, many of the city's inhabitants could not afford to eat wheaten bread and that there was a sizeable market for cheaper bread grains.²⁹ A related

²⁶ A town had to achieve a certain size, probably over 10,000, before it could markedly affect the agriculture of its region; see Kowaleski, *Local Markets*, p. 323.

²⁷ See James Galloway, 'Driven by Drink? Ale Consumption and the Agrarian Economy of the London Region, c. 1300–1400', above, Chapter 6.

²⁸ N.S.B. Gras, *The Evolution of the English Corn Market from the Twelfth to the Eighteenth Century* (reprinted London, 1926), p. 37.

²⁹ Campbell, Galloway, Keene and Murphy, *A Medieval Capital*, pp. 26, 121–23, 164–66.

example of urban demand influencing crop specialisation can be found in the hinterland of medieval Paris. There the growth in popular demand for cheap wine led to the replacement in many areas of high quality *cépages* by *mauvais gamay*, which produced an inferior wine but one which was affordable by poorer consumers.³⁰

Demesne account rolls, as mentioned above, contain detailed information on annual sales of manorial produce, which can help in identifying areas where crop specialisms were primarily market-led. Methods employed include assessing the frequency with which different crops were sold, comparing proportions sold and measuring the contribution of income from sales of each crop to overall manorial sales income.³¹ Applying these measures to the products of pastoral farming is, however, less straightforward. Animals were kept on demesnes for a variety of different purposes and were not always destined for consumption when they were sold. The exception to this rule was the adult porker (castrated pig), which was virtually always sold for food. Animal products such as milk, butter and cheese were also destined for fairly rapid consumption. A key tool in determining the spatial dimension in demesne sales of these products has been computer mapping. The data contained in demesne accounts are well-suited to mapping, relating as they do to discrete and identifiable places. Mapping those manors with above-average income from sales of pigs, for example, has revealed the possible impact of the metropolitan market, while mapping those manors which specialised in dairy produce points to the crucial importance of cheap (usually water) transport linking demesne and market.³²

While it is clear that the demands of London did influence agriculture in its hinterland, a concern of the project has been to assess the degree to which this influence was manifest in ways consonant with the predictions of geographical location theory. This body of theory holds that urban hinterlands will tend to develop zones or regions of specialized production as producers adopt the forms of land use which are most profitable in any

³⁰ 'Avant-propos', *Franco-British Studies*, 20 (1995), p. 3.

³¹ B.M.S. Campbell, 'Measuring the Commercialisation of Seigneurial Agriculture, c. 1300', in R.H. Britnell and B.M.S. Campbell, eds, *A Commercialising Economy: England, 1086-1300* (Manchester, 1995), pp. 132-93.

³² M. Murphy and J.A. Galloway, 'Marketing Animals and Animal Products in London's Hinterland, circa 1300', *Anthropozoologica*, 16 (1992), pp. 93-100.

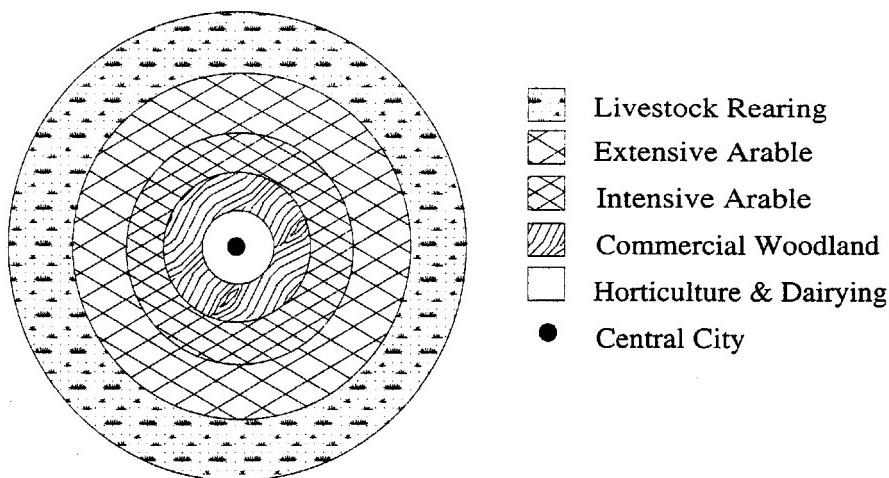


Figure 5: Simplified representation of Von Thünen's model of land-use zones.

given location.³³ It is only in recent years that historians have attempted to test the relevance of these theories to the medieval economy.³⁴

The Feeding the City project has drawn particularly on the work of the nineteenth-century German theorist J.H. von Thünen, who constructed an idealized model of the pattern of farming systems likely to be generated by a large central market.³⁵ The model predicts the emergence of a series of concentric zones characterized by different patterns and intensities of land use (see Figure 5). Von Thünen assumed that his town was situated, in isolation, at the centre of a level plain of uniform fertility, crossed by no navigable rivers or canals. The presence of other, smaller markets and of geographical features both facilitating and impeding transport would of course distort the predicted zones, but would not fundamentally change their logical order.

During the course of the research on agriculture in the London region, certain patterns have emerged which are indeed explicable in terms of von Thünen's theory. Thus, the perishable products of market-gardening and dairying assumed importance, and were profitable activities, on manors within a few miles of the city. Similarly, firewood and charcoal sales were significant components of manorial income close to

³³ M. Chisholm, *Rural Settlement and Land-Use: An Essay on Location* (1962).

³⁴ See for example F. Irsigler, 'L'approvisionnement des villes de l'Allemagne occidentale jusqu'au XVIe siècle', in *L'approvisionnement des villes*, pp. 117–44.

³⁵ P. Hall, ed., *Von Thünen's Isolated State: An English Edition of Der Isolierte Staat by Johann Heinrich von Thünen*, trans. C.M. Wartenberg (Oxford and New York, 1966).

London, and in locations with ready access to cheap water transport. With grain crops a definite tendency is evident for bulkier and low-value crops such as oats and rye to be grown close to the city, while wheat, whose high price greatly increased the area over which it could be transported, was more of a speciality on manors at a further remove. Although the fit between theory and historical evidence is by no means perfect, an awareness of the predictions of location theory has proved to be an important interpretative tool for the historian of urban provisioning.

Complex and extensive distributive systems had to evolve in order to transport the produce of the countryside into cities as large as medieval London. When towns grew beyond a certain size, perhaps 10,000 persons, they began to exceed the provisioning capacities of local trade. It was still possible for some town dwellers to obtain supplies of foodstuffs by direct provisioning; major religious institutions based in the cities developed regular, formal arrangements whereby food was sent in from their country estates. The provisioning needs of the canons of St Paul's Cathedral, for example, were met throughout the medieval period by a complex system of food farms involving manors up to forty miles distant from London.³⁶ However, the majority of urban dwellers had no such ability to bypass the market and therefore trade prevailed over alternative methods of supply.

Demesne account rolls frequently provide valuable material on the marketing and transport of agricultural produce and highlight the variety of methods used by producers of food to market surpluses. This is particularly true of accounts for manors in the London region, where rates of market participation were conspicuously high.³⁷ However, even on manors where all surpluses were diverted to meet the consumption needs of the lord's household, enlightening details can be found concerning the movement of goods from manor to household, such as the means of transport chosen, its cost, or the number of carts and draught animals involved. When the household was situated in or near London this information is particularly valuable.

Sales to London merchants as well as direct selling in the capital are documented in the account rolls. However, in general, the rural evidence would suggest that such direct, unmediated links with the capital were

³⁶ W.H. Hale, ed., *The Domesday of St Paul's of the Year MCCXII*, Camden Society, old series, 69 (1858).

³⁷ It has been calculated for example that c. 1300 half the grain produced by the demesne sector in the London region was distributed via the market. Campbell, Galloway, Keene and Murphy, *A Medieval Capital*, p. 74.

in the minority. This was in large part due to the growth and increasing sophistication of the network of local markets and fairs within the London region. Over 400 places within the study area had acquired market rights by the middle of the fourteenth century, a network of markets which provided near at hand outlets for the producer of agricultural surpluses and served to channel the produce of the countryside towards the centres of consumption.³⁸ It is reasonable to assume therefore that a large proportion of agrarian produce entered into commerce via these local outlets. The importance of certain markets is shown by their repeated appearance as places of sale in account rolls. Henley-on-Thames in Oxfordshire for grain and the fairs of Kingston in Surrey and Uxbridge in Middlesex for livestock are among these prominent centres.

Urban evidence corroborates and augments the picture produced by the rural evidence. Judicial and administrative records of the city of London are highly informative on the practice of trade by Londoners and by those who came into the capital from the countryside.³⁹ Municipal regulations document the ways in which producer and consumer came into direct contact in the metropolitan market places, where suburban gardeners came to sell fruit and vegetables and bakers from nearby small towns came to sell bread. These records also suggest that in fourteenth-century London such direct links between consumer and producer were probably lessening in importance. It is possible to document the emergence and growth of groups of specialized traders based in the capital, but frequently operating in the countryside, who acted as middlemen, linking capital and hinterland.

One approach adopted by the project has been to assemble evidence regarding the activities and interests of occupational groups within the city involved in the food and fuel trade. It has been possible to compile some prosopographical databases from municipal regulations, judicial and administrative records (both municipal and central), taxation returns and chronicles. So far this has been undertaken for the London 'blad-

³⁸ The project 'Market Networks and the Metropolis' at the Centre for Metropolitan History is examining the role of small towns and other markets in the circulation of agrarian produce in the London region.

³⁹ H.T. Riley, ed., *Liber custumarum*, in *Munimenta Gildhallae Londoniensis*, ii, pts 1 and 2 (Rolls Series, 1860); idem, ed., *Memorials of London and London Life* (London, 1868); R.R. Sharpe, ed., *Calendar of the Letter-Books Preserved among the Archives of the Corporation of London at the Guildhall: Letter-Books A-L* (London, 1899–1912); idem, ed., *Calendar of Early Mayor's Court Rolls, AD 1298–1307* (Cambridge, 1924); idem, ed., *Calendar of Plea and Memoranda Rolls, AD 1364–1381* (Cambridge, 1929).

ers' or cornmongers and the city woodmongers. Work is underway on the butchers.

Examining the activities of the well-documented early fourteenth-century cornmongers has provided valuable evidence for the organization of the grain trade within the city and also for the extent of the city's grain provisioning zone. This frequently corroborates evidence provided by the demesne accounts.⁴⁰ For example, Henley-on-Thames emerges as the single most important place of resort for London cornmongers and the only place outside London where they owned granaries. All the most significant interests of the cornmongers lay within the counties of the study area, thereby confirming the impression produced by the agrarian evidence that the productive capacity of the hinterland was sufficient to feed both its own population and that of a city of between 80,000 and 100,000 persons.

The London woodmongers formed a less wealthy and influential group than the cornmongers and are therefore less well documented. However, it has been possible to draw together information about some ninety individuals involved in London's wood market between the years 1275 and 1375.⁴¹ Within the city the woodmongers held property and pursued business activities in various riverine locations, underlining the importance of the Thames in the supply of fuel to the capital. Outside the city, there was a particular concentration of woodmongers' interests in Surrey, especially in Kingston-upon-Thames and Ham, which emerge from other sources as important entrepôts for the fuel trade.

The degree to which the methods used to study medieval London and its region can be used fruitfully elsewhere are, of course, largely dependent upon the nature and survival of source materials. The highly detailed documentation available on agricultural practices in London's hinterland in the fourteenth century is probably unmatched elsewhere in Europe. However, the archives of some European cities, Paris for example, are extremely rich in records on the regulation of trade, making it possible to reconstruct many aspects of the distributive system in a way that is not possible for medieval London.⁴²

Despite these differences, the fundamental features of the approach

⁴⁰ Campbell, Galloway, Keene and Murphy, *A Medieval Capital*, pp. 87–107.

⁴¹ Galloway, Keene and Murphy, 'Fuelling the City', p. 452.

⁴² See C. Bourlet, 'L'approvisionnement de Paris en poisson de mer aux XIV^e et XV^e siècles, d'après les sources normatives', *Franco-British Studies*, 20 (1995), pp. 5–22; B. Auzary-Schmaltz, 'Les contentieux en matière d'approvisionnement, d'après les registres du parlement de Paris', *ibid.*, pp. 49–68; Y. Le Maresquier-Kesteloot, 'L'approvisionnement de Paris en bois (XIV^e-XV^e siècles)', *ibid.*, pp. 69–84.

adopted in the 'Feeding the City' project should have wider applicability. The systematic interrogation of a range of urban and rural documentary sources in order to test the plausibility of independently-developed consumption estimates, and the use of geographical models to predict the emergence of specialised systems of production within urban hinterlands, are methods which can be employed in the study of the provisioning of other cities and of London itself at different time periods. The study of medieval London's food supply has identified several lines of enquiry which can now be taken further by members of the project team and others. Medieval townspeople were largely dependent on the labours of others for their daily food and drink; the impact of that dependency upon wider economic development was great, and its implications are as yet far from exhausted.

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The Household of Alice de Bryene, 1412–13

ffiona Swabey

Acton is a small village in Suffolk, some twenty miles north of the old Roman town of Colchester and twenty miles south of Bury St Edmunds. The name derives from the Anglo-Saxon *Aketon*, meaning an oak enclosure or settlement, though barely a vestige of that ancient forest now remains. The land is flat and fertile, mostly medium to heavy clay, watered by several small streams and suitable for both arable and pastoral farming. Acton's population of around seventy, as recorded in the Domesday survey of 1086, and 500 at the beginning of this century, has risen to more than a thousand people today.

Approaching Acton from the south, the first visible landmark is the square bell tower of the church. A few minutes' walk from there across the fields is Acton Hall, an early Victorian farmhouse on the site of the original manor. It is still a working farm. Evidence from a few extant bailiffs' reports suggests that in the fifteenth century, apart from farm and woodland of nearly 900 acres, the manor comprised numerous barns and stables, as well as a large dwelling house surrounded by a moat with a great hall, brewhouse, bakehouse and separate chapel. A small stream ran through the enclosed grounds, where there was also a well and a windmill.¹

From Michaelmas 1412 to Michaelmas 1413 Alice de Bryene served more than 16,500 meals at her Acton manor house, an average of forty-five meals a day. During this one year daily totals varied greatly. Sometimes,

¹ I am grateful to Martha Carlin and Joel Rosenthal for their encouragement. My book, *Medieval Gentlewoman: Life in a Gentry Household in the Later Middle Ages*, focusing on the life and times of Alice de Bryene, will be published by Sutton Publishing in 1999. See PRO, Acton bailiffs' reports, SC 6/989/6, SC 6/991/1, 6 and an undated steward's account, SC 6/1297/22. Below is a list of all the Compotus Rolls in the Public Record Office, London, relating to the estates of Alice de Bryene, receivers', bailiffs', and stewards' accounts for Dorset, Gloucestershire and East Anglia: SC 6/833/12, SC 6/842/25, SC 6/858/16–20, SC 6/989/1–18, 20, 21, SC 6/990/1–21, SC 6/991/1–6, 19, SC 6/1002/10–13, SC 6/1003/6–9, 21, SC 6/1007/3, SC 6/1245/9–17, SC 6/1247/3–5, SC 6/1249/1–10, SC 6/1297/22, DL/430/6904.

as at the New Year's feast, more than 300 people came to dine; at other times only three were invited to join her and those of her household who were present on that particular day. Some of her guests were eminent men, whose wives and children visited as well. About three times a week the bailiffs of one of her adjacent manors came to eat, as did the maid-servants and various estate workers. In addition, there were also about fifty clerical and religious visitors, many of whom came several times, nearly 200 boon workers during the harvest season, visits from more than one hundred assorted casual labourers and 120 other unnamed guests. Meals also had to be provided for the two dozen members of Alice's household.

This information comes from Alice de Bryene's Household Book, a fragment of her household accounts originally edited by Vincent Redstone in 1931.² Alice was not unusual in keeping such accounts; every large lay or ecclesiastical household seems to have kept similar records. Their primary purpose was to record the daily expenditure of victuals by the steward in charge of the overall management of the household. Keeping such accounts also helped deter household servants from theft and carelessness, enabled the detection of corruption and mismanagement, and assisted officials with future budgeting.³

Some accounts that have survived, such as those of Elizabeth de Burgh, Lady of Clare, a few decades earlier than Alice's, are very extensive and cover all aspects of housekeeping, including goldsmiths' accounts and travelling expenses.⁴ Alice's are much more modest. They relate primarily to the quantities of food served each day. Entries are prefaced with the date and a list of guests, many of whom are named; other visitors are described by their occupations or from where they came. A pantry account follows with the number of loaves delivered to the table. Note is made that wine and ale were served, though no quantity is specified. Then there are details of meat and fish sent from the kitchens, followed by the daily purchases which supplemented these provisions. Provender supplied to the horses in the stables and the total sum of purchases, where

² *The Household Book of Alice de Bryene*, ed. Vincent Redstone, Suffolk Institute of Archaeology and Natural History (2nd edn, 1984). The MS is at the PRO, C 47/4/8a & b.

³ C.M. Woolgar, *Household Accounts from Medieval England* (2 vols, Oxford, 1992–93).

⁴ Two other accounts worth looking at are those of Lady Margaret Cromwell, 1417–18, and Elizabeth, countess of Warwick, 1420–22. The former has been discussed by E. Price (unpublished thesis, the Institute of Historical Research, University of London, 1948, 'Ralph Cromwell and His Household'). The latter is the subject of an article by C. Ross, 'The Household Accounts of Elizabeth Berkeley, Countess of Warwick, 1420–21', *Transactions of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeology Society*, 70 (1951), pp. 81–105.

relevant, complete each entry. Figures are also given of the household brewing and baking, which took place at least once a week.

Such hospitality must have been the norm in most gentry households in the later middle ages. The evidence comes not only from Alice's Household Book, but also from over eighty bailiffs' reports now in the Public Record Office relating to her various manors, as well as a few compotus rolls deposited at the Department of Special Collections, University of Chicago Library. The survival of so many of these records is no mere accident. On the death of Alice's great-granddaughter, Avice, countess of Wiltshire, in 1457 with no surviving issue, there was a property dispute that took thirty years to resolve. All available records appear to have been taken into Chancery and now shed light on Alice de Bryene's dinner guests in 1412–13.

Alice was probably born at the Acton manor in Suffolk around 1360, the year her grandfather died, followed shortly by the death of her father, Sir Robert de Bures. Soon after her mother remarried Sir Richard Waldegrave, an eminent courtier and politician. It must have been through Waldegrave's acquaintance with Guy, Lord Bryan, a formidable and versatile statesman, that Alice's wedding was arranged with his eldest son, Sir Guy Bryan, around 1375. Two daughters survived this marriage, which ended with Guy's premature death eleven years later. The subsequent history centred around the devolution of the Bryan estates – with burglary, fraud, forgery and a well-documented family quarrel, as well as Alice's long widowhood in Suffolk – but that is another story. What is relevant here is that Alice did not remarry and sometime after her grandmother's death in 1391 she returned from Dorset to East Anglia to farm her estates. On her mother's death in 1406 her entire patrimony in Essex and Suffolk totalled over 3000 acres, with an equivalent amount in the west country, property that was her marriage jointure from Sir Guy. She died in 1435, aged over seventy-five. A brass commemorates her burial place in Acton church, where she also founded a chantry that survived until the Reformation.⁵

Before looking at specific details of Alice's hospitality it may be useful to make a few comments about her household economy. Alice's household and guests enjoyed an average daily mess of one two-pound loaf of bread and at least three and a half pints of ale, with wine for her social peers, more than a pound of meat a day, more than a dozen varieties of fresh fish and half a dozen types of shellfish, as well as the traditional

⁵ PRO, Chantry Certificates, E 301/45/13.

dried and smoked fish, plus a plentiful supply of dairy produce. Game birds were also on the menu, the food was moderately spiced and consumption of sugar very low.⁶ Adding together the estimated value of farm produce, meat and grain it would appear that Alice spent about 65 per cent of her household expenditure on food and drink. Discounting the value of home produce consumed and the cost of producing it, it seems she spent around 40 per cent of her total income of about £400 running the household, a figure that accords with the averages worked out for the period by Christopher Dyer and Christopher Given-Wilson.⁷

Let us now return to Alice's table and those 16,500 meals. First we should dispel the thought that Alice was a merry widow with an insatiable appetite for company. There is evidence that she did enjoy herself and that others enjoyed her company too, but that was not the main purpose of her hospitality. Nor should we conclude that such largesse was a result of charitable intentions. There are indications of her dispensing alms in the sense of food or grain, but not at dinner; later we shall look at one example of bread actually distributed from her table. And we cannot presume that Alice kept open house; far from it. Guest lists appears to have been carefully planned. Traditionally meals were served for convenience to diners in pairs; on only fifteen occasions in 1413 were there an odd number of guests. Again that year very few people visited the manor who might literally have knocked on her door in the hope of a meal, and one of them is specifically named in English (in the Latin accounts) as a *wayferour*, while another is called an *extraneo* or foreigner.⁸ So who were Alice's dinner guests, and why was she feeding them?

We can start with the workers, both casual and permanent estate staff, since they comprised the largest proportion of Alice's guests. Some can be identified from the bailiffs' reports, others by their trades. On 15, 16 and 17 February, for example, two carpenters engaged to make a plough dined at the manor. Two aspects should be considered here. First, the rate for this type of job, that of a craftsman or skilled labourer, as item-

⁶ The ale was fairly weak and may not have been drunk by all, but wine was regularly served. See Christopher Dyer, *Standards of Living in the Later Middle Ages: Social Change in England, c. 1200–1520* (Cambridge, 1984), pp. 57, 58, 63, for details of the comparative strengths of ale and an analysis of meat and spice consumption in Alice's household.

⁷ Christopher Given-Wilson, *The English Nobility in the Late Middle Ages* (London, 1987), p. 93.

⁸ Most likely the *wayferour* was a wayfarer, a medieval back-packer, but we cannot be certain. He could also have been a wafer-maker, like Langland's Haukin, in *The Vision of Piers Plowman*, who represented Active Life. Other passers-by included two 'sisters', travelling from Canterbury; there is no indication whether or not they were nuns.

ized in various compotus rolls relating to Alice's estates, was 4d. a day with a meal; in other words, dinner was a part of the remuneration.⁹ Secondly, it was also a practical measure, for the carpenters could hardly have got on their bikes, so to speak, and gone down the road for a snack, or home for a quick sandwich.

The other thing we may notice is that, though guest lists were carefully planned, little attempt was made to separate the social classes. Alice's sister-in-law Lady Waldegrave was also staying at the manor at this time with a son, maid-servant, squire and various household members. In fact 16 February appears to have been a feast day, since a swan – the pinnacle of Alice's culinary offerings – was on the menu. The more honoured guests would have sat with Alice at the high table and the lesser folk lower down. But eating at Acton was apparently still a communal affair, a custom which, writers like William Langland remarked a few decades earlier, was gradually disappearing.¹⁰ It is important to note this since, despite the obvious visible signs of a hierarchy with the lady and her peers eating together, probably literally above the other guests, the ritual of breaking bread in the hall would have reinforced a sense of community bonding, added to which courtesy dictated that small helpings of delicacies be sent down to less honoured guests.¹¹

Another practical reason for Alice's hospitality is that meeting at the dinner table might have been the only way people could actually sit down together, exchange views and do business. The frequent visits of

⁹ *The Household Book*, pp. 39, 40; 4d. per day appears to have been the usual rate for professional craftsmen working at the manor. Many of the anonymous visitors, for example the various 'boys' who came from the nearby villages and were hired to act as human scarecrows in the fields after the seed was sown, were paid only 1d., but were also fed at Alice's table. See *The Household Book*, pp. 6, 37, 44, 55, 58, 78, and PRO, *Acton bailiffs' Reports*, SC 6/989/10, 17, 18, for terms of employment and payment of casual labourers under *Minutiae*. Rates were not always consistent, however, and women were always paid less than men. In 1425 Margaret Fouler, relative of one of Alice's shepherds, received 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ d. for helping Edward Christmas with the thatching; he got 4d. for the job. However, they were both fed at the manor. PRO, SC 6/1249/5.

¹⁰ William Langland, *Will's Vision of Piers Plowman*, ed. E. Kirk and J. Anderson (New York and London, 1990), p. 91: 'Unhappy is the hall, every day of the week,/Where the Lord and Lady have no liking to sit./ Now has each rich man a rule to eat by himself/ In private parlour to avoid poor men/ Or in a chamber with a chimney-corner, and leave the chief hall empty/ That was made for men to eat their meals in.'

¹¹ In the thirteenth century Robert Grosseteste advised his patron, the countess of Lincoln, 'to order that your dish be so refilled and heaped especially with light courses that you may courteously give from your dish to right and left to all at the high table and to whom else it pleases you': D. Oschinsky, ed., *Walter of Henley and Other Treatises on Estate Management* (Oxford, 1971), p. 403.

the bailiffs, auditors, trustees, estate workers and maidservants from Acton and Alice's other manors illustrate this. If Alice had projects to discuss, or wanted, for example, to make a new appointment or reward hard work, what better way than over a meal? Though she may have had the opportunity of seeing her workers in the meadows and pastures of her estates, it would not have been the same as a discussion at the dinner table. Besides, eating itself is a great social leveller and often eases negotiations. Sometimes it may have been the only way she could make contact with one of her employees.

From 10 to 14 April 1413 a man called John Lytleton was a guest at Acton manor. He could hardly have come just for the day, since he was bailiff of Alice's Oxenham manor in Gloucestershire, some 300 miles away. From the few extant bailiffs' reports from Oxenham we know he made this journey every year, bringing cash from the rents and profits of the manor, together with news of the estate.¹² He was not the only official who came from far afield and therefore had a claim on Alice for bed as well as board. In November 1412 Morgan Gough, a former Bryan retainer from the west country, came to stay for a week. It seems he also worked for Alice, probably as receiver for her Gloucestershire and Dorset properties, a rather superior gentleman as we may deduce from the special dishes served every day of his visit. His arrival, not long after Michaelmas, suggests there was business on the menu as well as food.¹³

Occasionally the specific reason for one of Alice's invitations is very clear. Many of the tenants from some of her larger properties appear to have been asked to dinner once a year. On 26 and 27 February and 1 and 2 March 1413 John Talmache was invited to the manor. His father, who had rented land in Acton for more than twenty years, had just died. Obviously a new lease had to be negotiated; Talmache was a tenant of some social standing and his annual rent of 28s. was not a paltry sum. But the fact that he twice stayed the night suggests there was more to these meetings than routine organization, as may have been the case with the other tenants: time to commiserate, perhaps and to offer some sympathy, as well as to do business.¹⁴

¹² *The Household Book*, pp. 54–55; and PRO, SC 6/858/16–20 and SC 6/1247/3–5: Oxenham's bailiffs' accounts.

¹³ *The Household Book*, pp. 16–17.

¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 42–44, 47. PRO, Acton bailiffs' reports, SC 6/989/1–18: John Talmache was first invited for Sunday lunch just a week after his father died. It appears he and Alice may have been distantly related, since there is a seal on a contemporary document at Helmingham Hall, the family's ancestral home, that bears the arms of both Waldegrave and Talmache: E.D. Tollemache, *The Tollemaches of Helmingham and Ham* (1949), p. 29.

It was not unusual for guests to sleep at the manor as well as to have dinner, especially during the festive season. However, we may occasionally question the motives of some of Alice's overnight guests and consider her entertainment in a different light. Sir Robert Corbet, a sixty-year-old widower with an estate just a few miles away, visited Alice on five different occasions, four times staying the night, while enjoying supper and extras.¹⁵ Corbet had substantial properties in several counties, acquired through two well-planned marriages, and had been a member of Parliament for both Wiltshire and Hertfordshire. But it is unlikely that politics was the chief topic of his dinner conversation. Sir Robert, it seems, was prospecting for a new wife. Two years later he was elected to represent Suffolk in the April and November parliaments but spent most of the year in Shropshire. It was here that he successfully wooed his third wife, another rich widow like Alice.¹⁶

Sir Robert Corbet was not the only politician to call. In 1413 at least half a dozen members of parliament were invited to Acton manor.¹⁷ No doubt they were interested in Alice's views and opinions as a wealthy resident and landowner, and they were conscious of the patronage she could dispense. It would also have benefited her to keep in touch with them and with the latest developments. Furthermore, they would have provided her with stimulating company. Evidence of Alice's social standing is scant, but the fact that one day an unnamed squire of the newly-crowned Henry V came to visit suggests that she also had friends in courtly circles.¹⁸

If her politically minded dinner guests helped Alice keep in touch with government, then the visiting churchmen would have provided her with all the gossip of the countryside, *omnes rumores patriae*. Clerical and religious visitors add up to over 20 per cent of the total for the year.

¹⁵ *ad noctem et com'* and *ad cenam et com'*. *Companagium* was anything eaten with bread, including fruit, vegetables and meat, as well as raisins, almonds and figs.

¹⁶ *The Household Book*, pp. 6, 7, 41, 58, 78, 100. J.S. Roskell, L. Clark and C. Rawcliffe, eds, *History of Parliament: House of Commons, 1386–1421* (Stroud, 1992), pp. 654–56, for a résumé of Corbet's life and career.

¹⁷ Apart from Corbet they were Sir Andrew Boteler, MP for Essex; Sir John Howard, MP for Essex, Cambridgeshire and Suffolk; John Doreward, MP for Essex; Sir John Ingoldisthorpe, MP for Suffolk; and William Rokewode, another Suffolk MP. Possibly Alice's son-in-law Robert Lovell also visited in 1412; he became MP for Dorset in 1421. For details of their careers, see Roskell et al., *History of Parliament*.

¹⁸ *The Household Book*, p. 66. Much of the evidence of Alice's courtly connections is circumstantial but, judging by a letter he wrote her around 1393, Richard II knew Alice quite well. PRO, SC 1/51/24–iv; and Edith Rickert, 'Documents and Letters: A Leaf from a Fourteenth-Century Letter Book', *Modern Philology*, 25 (1917), pp. 249–55.

In some instances the reason for their invitations can be easily deduced as when, for example, they came to celebrate anniversaries. On 7 October 1412 and 10 June 1413 two friars from the neighbouring town of Sudbury dined at the Acton manor. They were there to commemorate with Alice the death of her father, fifty-three years previously, and of her mother seven years before.¹⁹ Apart from specific religious festivals, whether traditional or personal, many of the friars would have come questing for alms, but prepared apparently to sing for their suppers. Such were the visits of the Austin friars from nearby Clare on 28 February, the date of the translation of St Augustine's relics, and at the Annunciation, both occasions being special dates in their liturgical calendars. The friars may well have left with bulging purses and full stomachs, but Alice's household would also have been refreshed by interesting discourse.²⁰

Entertainment was sometimes more important than the meal itself. On 11 May Alice invited four local ladies for what must have been a rather special occasion. They were her cousin Margaret Sampson, Isobel Chapman, the wife of a tenant, and the two Agnes Whytes, wives of two members of her retinue. Apart from the rector of Withersfield who was a house guest and the unidentifiable John Blake, all the other male guests were labourers except for two friars who came from Norwich. 11 May was one of the days dedicated to St John of Bridlington, an Austin canon who died in 1379. His reputation as a wise and pious man had precipitated the manifestation of numerous miracles near his tomb and he was canonized in 1401.²¹ Everyone loves a story about a modern hero and it is even possible that the Norwich friars had met John of Bridlington. In this instance, we may consider Alice's dinner invitations to her friends more in the light of an opportunity to satisfy their appetites for education, curiosity and amusement than merely for a meal.

On 4 and 5 May Lady Joan Swinburne, one of Alice's distant relatives, paid a visit to Acton. She was a wealthy widow with manors of her own as well as property she inherited from her husband on his death in 1391.

¹⁹ *The Household Book*, pp. 3, 70. On 31 May 1413 two priests came some 400 miles from the Bryan chantry at Slapton in Devonshire to visit Alice. It was the day dedicated to St Petronella, when prayers were said for Lady Elizabeth Bryan, Alice's mother-in-law, who actually died before Alice was born. Despite their long journey the Slapton priests only stayed one night. It was a Wednesday, traditionally a fish day, but nevertheless Alice purchased butter and cream to provide some exotic sauces, *ibid.*, p. 68.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 43, 49.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 62. C.R. Cheney, *A Handbook of Dates for the Student of English History* (London, 1991); D.H. Farmer, ed., *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints* (2nd edn, London, 1989). The latter volume has 11 March as the date of the translation of St John of Bridlington's relics, while the former, which is more closely related to medieval sources, has 11 May.

A stepson, Sir Thomas Swinburne, who once tried to oust her from her inheritance, had died the previous year. It appears Lady Swinburne may have been visiting Suffolk in order to oversee the construction of her late husband's and stepson's double brass and altar tomb at Little Horkesley, just a few miles away.²² She travelled with a maid-servant, son, two squires, a chaplain, four valets and two grooms. Though she must have been able to enjoy a very sumptuous life style, Alice did not provide any festive food, though the purchase of eggs that day indicates that someone in the party was vegetarian, possibly the Lady Joan herself. She and Alice must have shared similar experiences and concerns and, even if they were not old friends, would at least have identified with each other. But, though they would have had much to talk about, leisure was not a fifteenth-century concept and Lady Swinburne's visit should not be seen in the nature of holiday.

Women figure less in Alice's household accounts than men; I hesitate to suggest that they were probably busy at home, tending their livestock and preparing their own family meals, but this may have been the case. When they were invited to the manor it was often to help Alice with extra work in the household. For example, on 29 December 1412 at least eleven ladies were asked to dinner, together with a harper, an unnamed friar and Richard Scrivener, who appears to have lived up to his name. Obviously the preparations for the forthcoming New Year's feast would have been considerable: decorating the hall, making garlands, preparing sweetmeats, setting up trestle tables, even composing word games, mummeries and riddles. The company dined well on beef, bacon, goose and conies, but we should not forget that this was a working lunch.²³

The New Year's feast was the busiest time of the social calendar. Alice invited a dozen or so of her intimate friends to help her host a dinner for more than 300 tenants and 'other strangers.' This description of some of her guests suggests that on this particular day there was *open house* at Alice's manor, or at least her tenants were able to bring along their friends and families. Here we may recognize one of the traditional aspects of medieval hospitality – that of social obligation. Everyone in the vicinity seems to have been invited and the tables were spread with two pigs, two swans, twelve geese, two joints of mutton, twenty-four capons,

²² *The Household Book*, p. 95; also, Roskell, Clark and Rawcliffe, *History of Parliament*, for the careers of Sir Robert and Sir Thomas Swinburne.

²³ *The Household Book*, p. 26. Most of the women who came were tenants and can be identified from the bailiffs' reports, one by her name. This was Agnes Lavender, who came with her daughter. No doubt there was a great deal of extra washing and cleaning to be done before the New Year festivities.

seventeen conies, beef, veal, suckling pig and whatever delicacy was made with twelve gallons of milk and spice from Alice's store cupboard.²⁴ Apart from the entertainment that may have been provided as a result of the labours of Alice's women friends a couple of days earlier, there was also a harper there to help liven up the party.

Another traditional aspect of medieval social obligation was charity and the giving of alms. The only time we can be certain Alice gave away food from her table was on Maundy Thursdays, when double the quantity of bread compared to the usual proportion of one loaf per diner was sent over from her bake house.²⁵ She also made occasional grants of grain. It appears there was an annual gift to three of the orders of friars who frequently came to dine: the Austin Friars of Clare, the Franciscans from Babwell and the Dominicans from Sudbury.²⁶ The quantities were hardly lavish, an average of four bushels each, which would have made thirty gallons of ale or 125 two-pound loaves, the minimum basic sustenance for one man for a couple of months. Paupers from the estate were also occasionally granted corn;²⁷ and twice note was made of quantities of grain given by Alice to help fund the repair of the bell tower at Acton church.²⁸

Corn was one of the most important commodities in the middle ages, providing essential basic nourishment. It was also used for payment, occasionally for barter and frequently as part of an annual wage. All Alice's estate staff received liveries of grain commensurate with their jobs, varying between two and six quarters per year. It is hardly surprising then that the harvest festival was an important celebration; a full barn meant security for the next twelve months. At Acton harvesting was done mostly by boon workers with some paid labour. During this

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 56, 107. There is a fragment of another household account for 1412, from 29 March to 30 April, also printed by V. Redstone. On Maundy Thursday for this year a double quantity of bread was also supplied to the table. Maundy Thursday was the day traditionally set aside for large-scale distributions and acts of charity.

²⁶ See PRO, Acton bailiffs' reports, SC 6/989/8-11, SC 6/990/1, SC 6/1249/1 and SC 6/1245/15, 17.

²⁷ PRO, Acton bailiffs' reports, SC 6/989/8, 10, 13-15 and SC 6/1249/2, 3, 5. One year the recipients of Alice's charity were actually named, which makes it easy to identify with their needs and indicates furthermore that they may have been destitute rather than just needy. They were Adam Blindman, Agnes Shepherd, John Wafer, Thomas Grye, Bartholomew Hykyn and William Prat.

²⁸ PRO Acton bailiffs' reports, SC 6/1249/2, SC 6/989/10. The later occasion was in 1405-6, the year both Alice's mother and eldest daughter died, which may partly explain this second gift.

time twice the usual quantity of bread was baked in Alice's ovens for the harvesters, who also received ale. Extra meat and fish were commissioned from the larders as well. Where there are details of harvest feasts it is apparent that little expense was spared and new dishes, jugs, spoons and cloths were also purchased for the occasion.²⁹

We should perhaps consider the provisions made for the harvest feast not only as an inducement or reward for the workers, but also in the nature of a talisman or charm. Successful farming could not be entrusted to factors in the material world alone; it was always wise to invoke a little extra help. Candlemas on 2 February, the date of the commemoration of the Purification of the Virgin Mary, was another popular feast, when all the candles that were to be used in mass throughout the year were consecrated. Alice gave her estate workers a penny on this day, to help them fulfil their financial obligations to the church, for all parishioners were obliged to process with a candle and offer a penny to the priest at mass.³⁰ But, like most Christian festivals, Candlemas also had pagan and folkloric elements; the burning of candles at this time of year was believed to help drive away the evil spirits that abounded in winter.

Not only was it essential to take steps to ward off misfortune in the precarious world of agriculture, but advisable to have a benefactor on your side as well. One of the saints depicted on the late medieval rood screen at Foxearth church, of which Alice was patron, was St Walstan. He was an eleventh-century prince who had renounced his claim to the throne and espoused a life of poverty as a reaper in Norfolk. Whatever St Walstan touched was believed to be fruitful. As patron of the harvest he enjoyed a substantial local following in East Anglia. His presence on the rood screen suggests that he was also one of Alice's personal saints; it can be no coincidence that she invited Thomas Malcher, her farm overseer and supervisor, to enjoy some pigeons with her on 20 June, St Walstan's day.³¹

This brief survey of some of Alice's guests who dined with her at Acton in 1412–13 should give us an idea of the motivation behind much of medieval hospitality. It would seem that in most instances a meal at the manor preceded or was part of the business of household or estate management. Sometimes it was part of the overall wage for a particular job of work, at other times guests came to help Alice in the household and to

²⁹ PRO, SC 6/989/8, 10, 13, 18, 20. In 1401 the harvesters ate a whole cow at their feast and nine years later butter was served with their bread.

³⁰ Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars* (New Haven, Connecticut, 1995), pp. 16–22.

³¹ *The Household Book*, p. 73; Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, pp. 200–5.

sell or buy goods. Often the guest list suggests that a business meeting was in progress. The invitations to various churchmen can be viewed as connected not only with religious observance and social obligation, but also in the wider aspect of involvement with the outside world, beyond the narrow confines of the manor and small community of farmers; the dissemination of information was an important feature of their visits. Likewise the arrival of various politicians indicates a concern to keep abreast of national affairs as well as a natural identification with a peer group. And there seems to have been time for Alice to enjoy and entertain her personal friends as well.

Focusing more specifically on the significance of food in the middle ages, we may consider Alice's hospitality in another light. Although the majority of her guests were connected in some way or another with her estates, the ultimate goal was the production of food, that is principally grain and stock. Here we may see Alice as providing the means for the sustenance and livelihood of numerous people. Yet she was in many ways as dependent on them for their services as they were on her, as much a servant as she was served. The daily dinners at Acton manor reinforced this sense of mutual dependency; food was the tie that bound them all.

*Queu du Roi, Roi des Queux:
Taillevent and the Profession of Medieval Cooking*

A.S. Weber

Guillaume Tirel, *dit* Taillevent (*c.* 1310–95), reputed author of the fourteenth-century cookbook *Le viandier*,¹ is still celebrated today as one of the greatest French cooks in history. He is mentioned by food historians and cookbook writers in the same reverent tones reserved for Marie-Antoine Carême and Auguste Escoffier, the ‘Emperor of Chefs’. Yet, by however far Taillevent surpassed his contemporaries in culinary skill, he nevertheless remained a man of his age and culture. The social disruption brought about by the French conflict with England in the late fourteenth century, as well as the subsequent centralization and expansion of the power of the Valois courts during Taillevent’s lifetime, provided civil servants such as Taillevent with unprecedented opportunities for advancement. Taillevent’s financial and social rise through the Valois kitchens can therefore be profitably examined as a reflection, not a transcendence, of the social conditions of the French court at the height of the Hundred Years’ War.

Fortunately, several court documents and charters concerning Taillevent’s career have survived and were assembled by Jérôme Pichon and Georges Vicaire in their 1892 edition of Taillevent’s *Le viandier*. Thanks to this material and the recent research of Terence Scully, Constance B. Hieatt and Christopher Dyer, as well as the participants of the colloquia on medieval cuisine held at Nice, Tours, Montreal and SUNY Stony Brook, it is now possible to make some educated guesses about the professional context within which Taillevent worked. We are now able to trace the connections between the circumstances surrounding his employment and the precipitous events of fourteenth-century French society. If we accept Pichon’s chronology, Taillevent died in his eighties, outliving several of his royal employers, a meritorious feat in an age which witnessed the ravages of the Black Death, the bloody Jacquerie, agricultural

¹ On the question of attribution of *Le viandier* to Taillevent, see Paul Aebischer, ‘Un manuscrit valaisan du *Viandier* attribué à Taillevent’, *Vallesia*, 8 (1953), pp. 73–85.

decline and the incursions and destruction of the English during the Hundred Years' War.

It is only within the last twenty years that food and eating habits have been seriously studied as social history. An examination of Taillevent's career reveals an intimate portrait of the courts of Charles V and Charles VI, and often provides a corrective to previous historical accounts. As Scully has pointed out, the fact 'that food is one of man's absolute necessities means that it must be a principal object of study by anyone who seriously hopes to understand the history of humanity'.²

According to the documentary and archaeological evidence collected by Pichon, Taillevent attained the rank of *écuyer* or squire. His tomb, near Saint-Germain-en-Laye and now preserved in the museum there, depicts a squire in full armour with a coat of arms incorporating three cooking pots. The date of death, unfortunately, has been damaged.³ *Écuyer*, however, was not necessarily a hereditary title in France. Taillevent is named on his tomb and in one document of 1368 as a *sergent d'armes*,⁴ but there is no indication in surviving documents that any of Taillevent's titles was hereditary or that he was of noble birth. In 1349 Taillevent was granted funds by Phillippe VI to found a chapel adjacent to his house called 'Larchière', but this does not necessarily indicate noble status.⁵ Of course, noblemen often served and carvered at the table of the king: at a feast given by the comte de Foix between 1458 and 1461, for example, the *maîtres-d'hostel* were the comte Gaston de Foix, the comte de Dunois, the comte de la Marche and the grand-sénéchal de Normandie.⁶ Although there are numerous examples of noble children serving as pages in the more prestigious houses in England and France, I strongly suspect that Taillevent himself came from a wealthy merchant or *haut bourgeois* family.

In Taillevent's period we can find several cases of French bourgeois artisans who rose to social and financial prominence as a result of their involvement in the Hundred Years' War. Pierre Baille, for example, began in the shoemaking trade and ended his career as treasurer of Normandy after 1436. Charles V's contemporaries perceived his court as one that

² Terence Scully, *The Viandier of Taillevent: An Edition of All Extant Manuscripts* (Ottawa, 1988), p. 30.

³ Jérôme Pichon and Georges Vicaire, eds, *Le viandier de Guillaume Tirel, dit Taillevent* (1892; reprinted, ed. Sylvie Martinet, Geneva, 1967), pp. xix-xx.

⁴ Ibid., pp. 264-65, 'pièces justificatives', no. 10.

⁵ Ibid., pp. 260-61, 'pièces justificatives', no. 4.

⁶ Pierre Jean Baptiste le Grand d'Aussy, *Histoire de la vie privée des Français depuis l'origine de la nation jusqu'à nos jours*, iii (Paris, 1782), p. 304.

encouraged talent over noble birth. The low-born counsellors of Charles's administration were scornfully dubbed '*les Marmousets*' by jealous noblemen. After 1366 royal counsellors were chosen solely by merit, rather than by alliance or birth.⁷

I suspect that Taillevent was not of noble birth primarily because he is first mentioned in 1326 as an *enfant de cuisine* at the coronation feast of Jeanne d'Évreux, wife of Charles le Bel.⁸ Another title for this lowest of kitchen positions was *garçon de cuisine*, whose responsibilities included rough and unskilled manual labour such as cleaning fish and plucking poultry.⁹ It is difficult to imagine someone of aristocratic or even wealthy mercantile birth assigned to these tasks, especially since *enfants de cuisine* were often employed in turning the roasting spit, a dirty and ill-requited task which was later performed by dogs, although it may have been thought that this would toughen them for a later military career.¹⁰ How then do we explain Taillevent's social leap from turnspit to *escuier de cuisine*, a position often held by a '*gentilhomme*, responsible for liaison between kitchen and table, between cooking staff and serving staff'?¹¹

We know that the period between the reigns of Philippe VI (1328–50) and Charles VI (1380–1422) witnessed explosive class conflicts which erupted in the peasant revolt of 1358 and in several civil disruptions in Paris, including the dictatorship of Etienne Marcel in 1358. We can therefore expect a certain measure of social flux and mobility during this period. Unlike the Capetians, who had allied themselves with the bourgeoisie against the feudal lords, the Valois kings, in whose service Taillevent spent the greater part of his career, supported and advanced the nobility, whose resources and military training were necessary in the continuing struggle against the English. During the reigns of Charles V (1364–80) and Charles VI the bourgeoisie constantly attempted to assert the rights of their professional organizations against the prerogatives of the crown, leading to a number of confrontations between the king and the city of Paris. In 1382 the city of Paris rose against Charles VI's reimposition of the *gabelle*, or salt tax, and refused

⁷ Françoise Autrand, *Charles V le Sage* (Paris, 1994), p. 712.

⁸ Pichon and Vicaire, *Le viandier de Guillaume Tirel*, p. viii. See p. xxx for a summary of Taillevent's documented titles.

⁹ Le Grand d'Aussy, *Histoire de la vie privée*, iii, p. 304.

¹⁰ Alfred Gottschalk, *Histoire de l'alimentation et de la gastronomie depuis la préhistoire jusqu'à nos jours*, ii (Paris, 1948), p. 323.

¹¹ Terence Scully, "Aucune science de l'art de cuysinerie et de cuysine": Chiquart's 'Du fait de cuisine', *Food and Foodways*, 2 (1987), p. 207.

the king entry into the gates of Paris. When Charles finally gained entry into the city, on 11 January 1383, he promptly executed scores of the rich bourgeois who had opposed him. Later, in 1413, the butchers of Paris, dubbed *Cabochiens* after their leader, rose and seized control of the city.

One effect of these class conflicts was that the Valois grew increasingly dependent on court servants such as Taillevent, not for only the preparation but also for the supplying of food. Royal procurement of food became an important issue for the Valois kings because of the severe shortages of food (especially during the famines of 1351 and 1539), and because of the disruption caused by the related agrarian revolts and the interruption of the Paris food industry. I suspect that Taillevent served as *panetier du roi* (although this was not one of his recorded titles), the official responsible for obtaining foodstuffs for the royal household under the system of *prise*. A civil servant who could successfully procure food from a ravaged countryside, and from a peasantry bent on hiding its produce from the *prise* collectors in specially-built *greniers*, would have won immediate royal favour. Taillevent's success in these ventures may have aided him in his career.

In the treacherous times of the Hundred Years' War and of corresponding civil conflicts in Paris and France, when poison could easily be slipped into a dish, or an assassination attempted in the dining room, a trusted kitchen servant was worth his weight in saffron. Taillevent was well rewarded for his services, receiving land and high wages, as well as grants of hay and lodging to aid him in his requisition of provisions for the king's household. In Taillevent's surviving wage receipts, we see a sharp rise in his income, as well as his increasing financial obligations to the king. In 1355 he received fifteen *livres* as an *escuyer d'hostel*, and from 1367 until the time of his death his wages stabilised at around fifty-five *livres* (six *sous* per diem).¹² In 1346, in an *ordre iteratif* of Phillippe VI, Taillevent is called 'our beloved cook' ('*notre amé queu Guillaume Tirel*').¹³

Taillevent obviously benefited from the intimate atmosphere of Charles V's court, at which, as Christine de Pisan reports in her biography of the king, Charles frequently 'exchanged with his servants, in agreeable familiarity, some pleasant and happy remarks, so that his kindness and gentleness would encourage even the least of them to joke

¹² Pichon and Vicaire, *Le viandier de Guillaume Tirel*, pp. 261–68.

¹³ Ibid., p. 258.

and enjoy themselves with him, however humble they might be'.¹⁴ Whatever Taillevent's origins, it is clear he was drawn into the circle of the court and perhaps identified himself with the nobility. A charter of 1355 shows him selling horses to the Dauphin (later Charles V). In 1370 he was asked to lend sixty-seven francs to Charles V 'to reinforce our constable, so that he can better and more powerfully combat our enemies'.¹⁵ It is very possible that Taillevent saw military service in the Hundred Years' War or in the suppression of the numerous Parisian revolts of artisans and bourgeoisie which plagued both Charles V and Charles VI. He was at the very least involved financially in the wars.

Taillevent also benefited from the labour shortages and increases in real wages following the Black Death, which killed perhaps a third of the population of Europe, thus reducing the numbers of valets, chambermaids, servants and kitchen helpers.¹⁶ In 1351 King Jean published an ordinance establishing wage limits for artisans and chamberlains; similar legislation had appeared in England with the Statute of Labourers (1351).¹⁷ Taillevent, as an experienced and trustworthy servant of the royal household, would have seen his status and value increase as wage labourers became scarce and began demanding higher wages. Taillevent also took advantage of the cash-strapped royal finances and received land and privileges in return for his services. He made his career in a court that displayed increasing hostility to the working and bourgeois classes, and it is possible that he himself no longer identified with those classes or viewed himself as the working artisan which he essentially was. Eustache Deschamps (1346–1406) wrote about this flight towards the upper classes among those with the requisite wealth and court connections:

¹⁴ Christine de Pisan, 'The Book of the Deeds and Good Character of King Charles V the Wise', trans. Glenda McLeod, in *The Writings of Christine de Pizan*, ed. Charity Cannon Willard (New York, 1994), pp. 236–37.

¹⁵ Pichon and Vicaire, *Le viandier de Guillaume Tirel*, p. 265, 'pour enforcier nostre connestable, afin qu'il puist miex et plus poissanment combatre noz ennemis'.

¹⁶ On this question in relation to food production and consumption, see Fernand Braudel, *Capitalism and Material Life, 1400–1800* (London, 1974), chapter 2; Stephen Mennell, *All Manners of Food: Eating and Taste in England and France from the Middle Ages to the Present* (Oxford, 1985), pp. 42–47; G. Persson, 'Consumption, Labour, and Leisure in the Late Middle Ages', in *Manger et boire au moyen âge*, ed. Denis Menjot, i (Paris, 1984), pp. 211–23.

¹⁷ E. Levasseur, *Histoire des classes ouvrières et de l'industrie en France avant 1789*, i (Paris, 1900), pp. 500, 501 n.1.

Today everyone is misled.
 For each person wants to maintain great state
 And thus there is no one anymore
 To undertake the labours of the age.
 Everyone should keep to his own degree
 Without being ashamed to do his job,
 But everyone wants to become a squire,
 So that today one can hardly find a worker.¹⁸

Service in the king's household guaranteed not only protection, but also the possibility of making connections leading to advancement. Caxton's compilation entitled *The Book of Curtesye* (1477–78) urged:

Awayte, my chyld, whan ye stonde at table,
 Off mayster or soverayne whether yt be,
 Applye you for to be servysable
 That no defawte in you fownden be;
 Loke who dothe best, & hym folow ye,
 & in especyall vse ye attendavnce
 Wheryn ye shall your selfe best avaunce.¹⁹

Despite Taillevent's movement in royal circles, and his financial transactions with Charles V, he must always have encountered some contempt for being connected with a dirty and manual occupation. Even though the jobs of *sergent d'armes* and *premier queu* (two of Taillevent's titles) required a variety of skills, such as basic reckoning, financial responsibility and managerial ability, the taint of the kitchen cannot entirely have left Taillevent. Scully has shown, however, with the example of Maistre Chiquart Amiczo, cook of the duke of Savoy, that a master cook could be literate and well-educated enough to spice his cookbook with Latin quotations from Virgil.²⁰ As the provisioner of a royal household, Taillevent's final position at the court of Charles VI, he was responsible for

¹⁸ Quoted in Levasseur, *Histoire des classes ouvrières*, i, p. 526:

Deceus est tout le monde aujourd'hui.
 Car chacuns veult grant estat maintenir,
 Et si n'est mès aussi comme nullui,
 Pour les labours du siècle maintenir:
 Chascun deust son état retenir,
 Sanz honte avoir de faire son mestier,
 Mais chascuns veut escuier devenir:
 A paine est-il aujourd'hui nul ouvrier.

¹⁹ F.J. Furnivall, ed., *Caxton's Book of Curtesye*, EETS, extra series, 3 (1868), p. 13.

²⁰ Scully, 'Chiquart', p. 205.

the transfer and safekeeping of large sums of money, goods and expensive spices. Le Grand d'Aussy, following an account by Olivier de la Marche (*Etat de la Maison de Bourgogne*) written in the mid fifteenth century, describes the duties and privileges of the master cook under the Valois:

The master cook had the privilege of carrying a dish to the duke's table, to have a seat next to the fireplace of the kitchen, and to sit there when he wanted. The keeping of the spices was entrusted to him. He commanded everyone in the kitchen; and, in accordance with his title, he carried, when he was working, a great wooden spoon, which he used as much to taste the soups as to correct his subordinates when they were negligent.²¹

We see here the master cook organizing and supervising the kitchen in a managerial capacity, much like the executive chef in large hotels today. The instructions for managing a feast in *Le ménagier de Paris*, an anonymous conduct and home economy book written near the end of Taillevent's life, show the haute bourgeoisie imitating Taillevent's culinary and executive practices with multiple courses and highly-processed and labour-intensive dishes.

Another important responsibility of the master cook was to ensure that his foods provided a proper diet in accordance with contemporary dietary science. The preface of *The Forme of Cury*, a recipe collection compiled by the master cooks of Richard II of England, states that 'it was compiled by assent and auysement of Maisters and [i.e., of] phisik and of philosophie that dwel lid in his court'.²² Numerous Latin dietaries from the thirteenth to the sixteenth centuries have survived, such as the *Mensa philosophica* (attributed to Michael Scott, thirteenth century), the *Tacuinum sanitatis* (popular from the fourteenth to the seventeenth centuries) and Andrew Borde's *Dyetary* and *Breuiary of Helthe* (both 1547). All of these works draw on the dietary traditions of Galen, Hippocrates and Arabic medicine and quote Avicenna, Averroes and Dioscorides as authorities. In the dietary tradition, foods had to be mixed or tempered according to their Aristotelian elemental and humoural properties – hot, cold, wet and dry. The *Tacuinum* quotes Avicenna as recommend-

²¹ Le Grand d'Aussy, *Histoire de la vie privée*, iii, pp. 303–4; 'Le Maître-queux avait le privilège d'apporter à la table du Duc un plat, d'avoir un siège dans la cheminée de la cuisine, & de s'y asseoir quand il voulait. La garde des épices lui était confiée. Il commandait à tous les gens de la cuisine; &, à ce titre, il portait, quand il était en fonction, une grande cuillière de bois, qui lui servait tant à goûter les potages qu'à corriger ses sous-ordres, lorsqu'ils manquaient en quelque chose'.

²² Constance B. Hieatt and Sharon Butler, eds, *Curye On Inglysch: English Culinary Manuscripts of the Fourteenth Century*, EETS, new series, 8 (1985), p. 20.

ing ‘‘that a contrary is reduced to a tempered mean by means of its contrary’’, just as if he were to say that the moist should be tempered by admixture with the dry, and the cold with the hot, and the fat and oily be tempered by blending with the salt and acid, etc.²³ Similar advice on matching the elemental qualities of foods with humoural dispositions occurs in Sir Thomas Elyot’s *Castel of Helth* (1534). The oldest French cookbook, dubbed the *Enseignements* (c. 1300), follows in manuscript a medical treatise of Henri de Mondeville (1306), surgeon to Philippe le Bel. Mondeville stresses the importance of diet in medical treatment: ‘those who are healed by foods are more easily brought to health [temperament] than those who are healed by medicines’.²⁴ Andrew Borde echoes this sentiment in the sixteenth century: ‘A good cook is half a physician, for the chief physic (the counsel of a physician except) doth come from the kitchen’.²⁵ Editions of Taillevent’s *Le viandier*, such as that of the mid fifteenth-century Vatican manuscript, contain recipes for the sick, and it seems to have been commonly expected that the cook would consult the court physicians in matters of proper food mixtures.

Scully observes that although the recipes of the various editions of the *Viandier* do not demonstrate a detailed knowledge of humouralism, ‘what is usually reflected in the *Viandier*, however, is a culinary practice that recognizes in a general way the doctrines propagated by contemporary medical schools concerning the most wholesome means of cooking and preparing particular meats and the most salubrious condiments to be consumed in conjunction with them’.²⁶ Chiquart’s cookbook, also containing recipes for the sick, states that the doctor should always be consulted before serving dishes to an invalid.²⁷ Thus we see the important, one might say essential, role of the cook in aristocratic society: if the prince was the head and heart of the body politic, his cook was the physician, instrumental in protecting the health of both the monarch and the realm.

The idea that meals served as a binding social function, and provided a site for the display and propagation of power, has now become com-

²³ Arthur Way, trans., *The Science of Dining (Mensa Philosophica)* (London, 1936), p. 6.

²⁴ Marie-Christine Pouchelle, ‘Une parole médicale prise dans l’imaginaire: alimentation et digestion chez un maître chirurgien du XIV^e siècle’, *Pratiques et discours alimentaires à la renaissance: actes du colloque de Tours 1979*, ed. Jean-Claude Margolin and Robert Sauzet (Paris, 1982), p. 183: ‘ceux qui sont guéris par des aliments sont plus facilement ramenés à leur tempérament que ceux que l’on guérit par des médicaments’.

²⁵ Charles Cooper, *The English Table in History and Literature* (London, 1929), p. 23.

²⁶ Scully, *The Viandier*, p. 23.

²⁷ Idem, ‘Chiquart’, p. 204.

monplace among food historians. Bruno Laurioux sums up this widely accepted observation:

In manuscript illuminations, meals appear clearly as a social stage play, where the rank of each banqueter is carefully indicated by, among other things, the place that one occupies at the table, the richness of the seat that one is allotted, the possession of tableware and the proximity to luxurious table ornaments.²⁸

Taillevent's employers – Phillippe VI, Charles V and Charles VI – more than any other French monarchs exemplified the use of the table and feast to establish an ordered hierarchy. At the feast, the most powerful princes of the blood could instantly witness who was in and who was out: for example, 'the most bitter injury that one could inflict on a knight was to cut the table cloth on his right and left, which signified that he was cut off from society as having been false to honour; this tradition had been instituted by Bertrand Du Guesclin' during the reign of Charles V.²⁹ At the table, nobles and king assembled into a microcosm of the realm, together, yet separate in power and station. Even communal eating and drinking demonstrated social distinctions which divided the ranks of society. As Georg Simmel has pointed out: 'common eating and drinking unleashes a huge socializing power, which allows one to overlook the fact that man is scarcely in reality "the same", but eats and drinks completely individual portions'.³⁰

Taillevent would have been entangled in the complicated web of social distinctions at the Valois court – as cook he knew what went down the

²⁸ Bruno Laurioux, 'Table et hiérarchie sociale à la fin du moyen âge', in *Du manuscrit à la table: essais sur la cuisine au moyen âge et répertoire des manuscrits médiévaux contenant des recettes culinaires*, ed. Carole Lambert (Montreal, 1992), p. 87: 'Sur bien des enluminures, le repas apparaît clairement comme une mis en scène de la société où la qualité de chaque convive est soigneusement indiquée par, entre autres, la place que celui-ci occupe autour de la table, la richesse du siège qui lui est alloué, la possession de couverts, la proximité d'objets de table luxueux'.

²⁹ Gottschalk, *Histoire d'alimentation*, p. 329: 'la plus sanglante injure qu'on pût infliger à un chevalier était de trancher la nappe à sa droite et à sa gauche, ce qui signifiait qu'on le retranchait de la société comme ayant forfait à l'honneur; tradition qui aurait été instituée par Bertrand Du Guesclin'.

³⁰ Georg Simmel, *Soziologie der Mahlzeit* (1910), quoted in Margarete Zimmerman, 'Kochkunst im spätmittelalterlichen Frankreich: *Le ménagier de Paris*', in *Essen und Trinken in Mittelalter und Neuzeit*, ed. Irmgard Bitsch et al. (Sigmaringen, 1987), p. 103: 'Das gemeinsame Essen und Trinken . . . löst eine ungeheure sozialisierende Kraft aus, die übersehen lässt, dass man ja gar nicht wirklich "dasselbe", sondern völlig exklusive Portionen isst und trinkt . . .'

gullets of the nobility, who got the expensively spiced dishes, the delicate songbirds, the largest and most prime portions. The court cook must have played a central role in disseminating gossip and information about the political happenings at court and the social standing of its members. He, after all, implemented the king's public punishment and reward system instituted at the table and bridged the two worlds of kitchen and dining-room, serving as an intermediary and messenger between those two domains.

The king's master cook was expected to maintain a high level of decorum and, in the use of spices and elaborate subtleties, to reinforce on a daily basis both the power of the monarch and his largesse. As Bridget Henisch points out, 'the concept of understated elegance was not one which came easily to the medieval mind, and a host liked to use expensive ingredients, and be seen to use them, as a compliment to his guests and a proof of his own prosperity. For the purposes of conspicuous consumption, spices were a godsend.'³¹

We have inherited from the middle ages a surprising number of metaphors for social distinction drawn from food and eating: sitting 'below the salt' indicated inferior rank, being served the 'upper crust' signalled access to the choicest privileges of wealth, and being born with a 'silver spoon' in one's mouth guaranteed a life among society's elect. The sumptuary laws of medieval England, France and Italy also demonstrate the contemporary awareness of food as a central indicator of social status. Phillip le Bel, in a sumptuary ordinance of 1294, 'forbade every subject to have served as an ordinary meal more than one dish and one side dish; and, for larger meals, more than two dishes with a *potage au lard*'.³² In 1363 in England 'it was enacted that the servants of gentlemen, merchants and artificers should have only one meal of flesh or fish in the day, and that their other food should consist of milk, butter and cheese'.³³ One function of these sumptuary laws was obviously to decrease consumption and to foster religious, political and judicial temperance and good judgement, especially in times of famine; and to force the lower classes to remember their place and dress their tables in accordance with their social class. But in the case of sovereigns such as Phillip le Bel, the king also hoped to regulate the table as a political event. For example, outdoing the king in lavishness and liberality at the

³¹ Henisch, *Fast and Feast*, pp. 103–4.

³² Le Grand d'Aussy, *Histoire de la vie privée*, iii, p. 229, 'défendit à tout sujet de se faire servir, pour un repas ordinaire, plus d'un *mêts* et d'un *entremêts*; et, pour les grands repas, plus de deux mets avec un *potage au lard*'.

³³ Cooper, *The English Table*, p. 5.

feast was not only an act of bad taste but also a serious political affront, since the splendor of one's table was a transparent allegory of both one's social rank and political or military power. This was an important issue throughout the Hundred Years' War since the various noble houses of France were continually warring among themselves for status and political power.

An examination of the culinary habits of Taillevent's main employer, Charles V, can provide us with an alternative perspective on the history of his realm. Although Charles V won the sobriquet of '*le Sage*' for his interest in learning and the sciences, estimates of his judgement and governing abilities have varied. Joseph Calmette expresses a standard view of Charles V: 'he certainly governed, in all loyalty, for what he understood to be the greatest good of France'.³⁴ Christine de Pisan, whose father Thomas had served as Charles's court astrologer, wrote a commissioned biography of the king which agrees with Calmette's interpretation. Her description of Charles's eating habits paints a picture of a sober, deliberate king absorbed in the cares of defending a kingdom. She wrote: 'he would go to the table around ten o'clock. His meal was not long, for he did not favour elaborate food, saying that such food bothered his stomach and disturbed his memory. He drank clear and simple wine, light in colour, well cut, and not much quantity nor great variety'.³⁵ This is the same king, however, who along with his wife received 'through a papal bull of Gregory XI, the permission to eat milk, butter, cheese and eggs during Lent. His kitchen staff were authorized to taste his dishes and his officers to check for poison'.³⁶ Le Grand d'Aussy, an eighteenth-century historian, printed an inventory of the gold and silver vessels in Charles V's household and the list is stunning. Le Grand d'Aussy then asked, with some sarcasm, 'how could Charles V have procured such treasure? Or rather, how could the nation, in a time when the mines of America were not yet in existence for Europe, have accumulated so much metal for the use of the sagest of France's kings?'³⁷

³⁴ Joseph Calmette, *Charles V* (1945; reprint, Paris, 1979), p. 214: 'Il a certainement gouverné, en tout loyauté, pour ce qu'il entendait être le plus grand bien de la France'.

³⁵ *The Writings of Christine de Pizan*, ed. Willard, p. 237.

³⁶ Gottschalk, *Histoire d'alimentation*, p. 346: 'par une bulle du pape Grégoire XI, la permission de manger du lait, du beurre, du fromage et des oeufs en Carême; les cuisiniers du roi étant autorisés à goûter ces plats et les officiers d'en faire l'essai'.

³⁷ Le Grand d'Aussy, *Histoire de la vie privée*, iii, p. 222: 'comment le Roi Charles V avait-il pu se procurer un pareil trésor! ou plutôt, comment la Nation, dans un tems où les mines de l'Amérique n'existaient pas encore pour les Européans, avait-elle attiré chez elle assez de métaux, pour que le plus sage de ses Rois en employât . . . ?'

Under Charles V and Charles VI, the kitchen run by Taillevent included forty-eight persons, not including the thirteen *maistres d'hostel*.³⁸ Both Charles V and Charles VI employed more kitchen personnel than even the ostentatious Louis XV. Our image of Charles V ruling solely *pour la France* must therefore come under scrutiny. One could plausibly argue that the maintenance of an extensive and cohesive royal household, centred around the public drama of the feast table, helped to forge the necessary noble alliances and national unity that would eventually become necessary in expelling the English from France. But at what cost? I have mentioned above how France several times from the 1350s onwards veered towards civil wars exacerbated by deep class divisions. Le Grand d'Aussy, obviously with an eye to praising the sobriety of his own monarch, cannot hide his uncharitable attitude towards the Valois court: he calls the Valois table *un faste inutile* (a useless ostentation) and observes that 'Charles V was the first to introduce more pomp into his house. The same spirit of ostentation which inspired him to accumulate a large collection of tableware, also drew him to maintain a numerous household'.³⁹ It is interesting that in both Christine de Pisan's and Le Grand d'Aussy's assessments of the period sobriety and temperance in eating and drinking are synonymous with wise government, a reference to the classical metaphor of the body politic which required proper balance in order to ensure good health. The various versions of Taillevent's *Le viandier*, many appearing after his death, reflect an expensive and Epicurean cuisine in its increased employment of foreign colouring agents, rare imported spices and food sculptures. As Liliane Plouvier points out concerning the Vatican manuscript of *Le viandier* (c. 1450): 'the arrival of a class of nouveaux riches introduced another art of living which expressed itself in a taste for eccentricity and ostentation. Food, like clothing, was the most striking manifestation of this trend'.⁴⁰

In our investigation of Taillevent and his times, we have seen how the history of cuisine at the Valois court, in which Taillevent played such a central role, must be taken into account in any historical interpretation

³⁸ Gottschalk, *Histoire d'alimentation*, p. 326.

³⁹ Le Grand d'Aussy, *Historie de la vie privée*, iii, pp. 222, 298: 'Charles V fut le premier qui mit plus de faste dans sa Maison. Le même esprit d'ostentation qui l'avait porté à se donner une vaisselle immense, le porta aussi à se donner une Maison nombreuse'.

⁴⁰ Liliane Plouvier, 'La gastronomie dans *Le viandier de Taillevent et Le ménagier de Paris*', in *Manger et boire au moyen âge*, ed. Menjot, ii, p. 151: 'L'avènement d'une classe de "nouveaux riches" a introduit un autre art de vivre qui s'exprime dans un goût pour l'excentricité et l'ostentation. La nourriture comme le costume en est la manifestation la plus évidente'.

of the period. Taillevent's career provides a portrait of the social structure of fourteenth-century France. The eating and food-preparation habits of a society can reveal some of the subtleties and intricacies of its history, often obscured by propaganda, the lack of written documentary sources and the imperfect critical faculty of both the historian and contemporary witness.

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Medieval and Renaissance Wedding Banquets and Other Feasts

Susan F. Weiss

Feasting and making music have almost always, since ancient times, gone hand in hand. The feast or banquet is seen as a locus of pleasure and plenitude, a kind of hedonism, a way of liberating the senses and deriving enjoyment of a rather sensual nature.¹ According to Tinctoris, in his treatise *Complexus effectuum musices*, 'Music increases the joyfulness of banquets'.² 'Gracious living in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries required music after dinner, and so [too] after a staged banquet, the actors often sang'.³

Music was a very important part of a real-life Bolognese feast celebrating the wedding of Annibale Bentivoglio and Lucrezia d'Este in 1487, an event, documented in some detail, that gave rise to extravagant entertainment beginning about five days before the actual ceremony. Eight hundred casks of wine and 30,000 pounds of meat were provided for an unspecified number of guests and an additional 3000 spectators.⁴

¹ In the short allegorical tale *Fabula de homine* (1518), the Spanish philosopher Vivès, taking up a favourite theme of the Italian humanists, praises the dignity of man. He describes a birthday banquet celebrated by Juno and the gods of Olympus. A setting has to be provided, and so Vivès seats his hero at the table of the gods. Michel Jeanneret, *A Feast of Words: Banquets and Table Talk in the Renaissance* (Chicago, 1991), pp. 14ff.

² Alberto Gallo, *Music of the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1985), ii, p. 106; quoting J. Tinctoris, *Theoretical Works*, ed. Albert Seay (Rome, 1975) ii, pp. 159–77.

³ Howard M. Brown, *Music in the French Secular Theatre* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1963) p. 84. See also Bridget Ann Henisch, *Fast and Feast* (University Park, Pennsylvania, 1976), pp. 209ff. Henisch states that music had three principal parts to play at a feast: to punctuate, by announcing the ceremonial high points of the meal; to delight the diners; and to charm away the pangs of indigestion. Henisch also discusses the importance of carol singing during certain important annual feasts, such as Christmas and Twelfth Night. See also Madeleine Pelner Cosman, *Fabulous Feasts* (New York, 1995), p. 18, for more on banquet music during the middle ages and Renaissance.

⁴ See Susan F. Weiss, 'Musical Patronage of the Bentivoglio Signoria', in *Atti del XIV congresso della società internazionale de musicologia* (Bologna, 1990), iii, pp. 703–15; Sabadino's 'Hymeneo' and Salimbeni's 'Epithalamium' include extensive descriptions of food, music, guests, costumes, etc. The paintings of the Mannerists, first in Italy, and later in northern Europe, reserved a special place for the mythological banquet that depicted

The highpoint of the days of celebration came in the form of a huge spectacle, a masque in four acts, symbolizing the triumph of Marriage over Chastity, combining mythological and allegorical characters typical of most courtly entertainment at the time. Following the performance, no doubt as a *quid pro quo* for all that meat, couples from the butchers' guild were invited to dance until the small hours of the morning. We even know the titles of some of the music and have located compositions in contemporary sources.⁵

Another important fount of information regarding food in Bolognese life comes from a rustic eclogue that describes a peasant country picnic with feasting and dancing, written in 1508. Its author, Cesare Nappi, gives names of dishes and beverages, many from the more rustic cuisine, including charcoal meats, wines, cheeses, frittata and bruschetta. He also uses typical peasant names for the characters, instruments, dances and songs popular in the early sixteenth century. The characters take an active role in preparing the feast, in eating it, in practising their musical instruments – such as the *sordetta* (modern-day harmonica), *rebec* (a modern-day fiddle or mandolin), *piva*, *zampogna* and *cornemusa* (peasant varieties of bagpipes), flutes, drums and castanets – and their dances, among them, country dances, such as the *saltarello* and 'La Pigna' ('The Pine Cone'), and dances with titles taken from popular tunes such as 'Fortuna d'un gran tempo' and 'Levata la strenga',

continued

the gods arranged around a table laden with fruits and flowers. Often there are musical instruments intended to accompany the dancing. Into this atmosphere of beauty, luxury and abundant happiness come the characters: Hebe pours the ambrosia and nectar (cocktails in the modern sense), Bacchus or Fauns fill goblets, Apollo plays his lyre, Pan his pipes, the Muses sing, the Graces dance, etc.

⁵ Another well-documented event was the marriage of Cosimo I, duke of Florence, and Eleanore of Toledo in 1539. In 1968 Andrew Minor and Bonner Mitchell published an edition of the music, poetry, comedy and a descriptive account of the festivities surrounding that wedding. Eight madrigals were performed, newly written for the occasion by Corteccia, Costanzo Festa, Giovanni Masconi, Baccio Moschini and Matteo Rampolini. At the conclusion of the comedy the *bacchantes* assemble on stage, dancing, singing, drinking and eating. Some carry drinking vessels, others, quarters of raw meat, all singing 'Bacco, Bacco euoe' (Minor, p. 35). Needless to say all were very drunk and performed accordingly. The spectators were then treated to cool wines and sweetmeats. Throughout the comedy, a variety of foods are mentioned, such as apples, corn, goat cheeses and the ubiquitous olive. Hymns are sung to Flora, the goddess of agriculture and of the harvest, whence the name Florence. Most of the references to food are made in the context of the costumes of the various characters.

whose first line of text reads ‘Loose that piece of ribbon lacing your bosom and let me admire those violets of yours’.⁶

Music was indeed a part of the entertainment connected with feasts, and part of this essay will examine the ways in which musicians and instruments contributed to the pleasure of the events. There also exists a repertory of pieces (both courtly and popular) that contained descriptions of feasting, or even mention of food. Differences emerge that distinguish courtly and peasant events in the differing cuisines, the types of instruments used, the roles of the musicians, the musical material itself and the metaphoric references to food in the text, general and somewhat cloaked on the one hand, specific and more overt on the other. One part of this essay will examine the entertainments – both real-life and staged; another will look at actual compositions that contain specific reference to food or feasting.

Adam de la Halle’s *Jeu de Robin e Marion*, a pastourelle with the rare inclusion of melodies for all of its songs, is thought to have been written for the entertainment of homesick troops in c. 1282 when the composer was in Italy in the service of Robert II, count of Artois.⁷ The second half

⁶ Cesare Nappi, ‘Egloga villereccia’, in MSS Cesare Nappi, Biblioteca Universitaria, Bologna 1508. Speaking of symbolism, throughout history it seems as though food or food substances could be used as metaphors for sex. In an ancient Greek flower song of unknown authorship, the leader of a group of dancing girls sang the first line and the chorus repeated with the second of a text whose translation is: ‘Where are my roses, where are my violets, where is my beautiful parsley?’, or ‘Here are the roses, here are the violets, here is the beautiful parsley’, noting that ‘parsley’ was plural. See James Turney Allen, *The First Year of Greek* (New York, 1932), pp. 4–5. My thanks to Professor Constance B. Hieatt, for sharing this information with me. In the middle ages, women were obliged to stay in the kitchen and men believed that women were capable of increasing or decreasing their sexual ardour by adding to food such things as nail parings, menstrual blood, semen or dough kneaded with a woman’s buttocks. A source of information regarding the effect of food on the sexual appetite is the medical literature, such as Avicenna’s *Liber canonis*, which contains a text for the cure of priapismus. Many accusations were levied against women who tried to make men fall in love with them, and the literature on witchcraft contains information about the recipes used by these ‘witches’. One source is the *Malleus maleficarum*, another is Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie’s *Montaillou: The Promised Land of Error* (New York, 1979). I am grateful to Professor Helen R. Lemay for providing me with the names of these sources.

One of the numbers in a revival of Cole Porter’s musical *Out of This World*, which opened in April 1995 in New York, a licentious spoof of the *Amphytrion* legend, is ‘Cherry Pies Ought to be Fun’, a duet between the characters Mercury and Chloe who regale each other with superlatives as they bask in the glow of their recent encounter.

⁷ Adam de la Halle, *Jeu de Robin e Marion*, edited and translated Shira I. Schwam-Baird; music edited by Milton G. Scheuermann, Jr (New York, 1994). The medieval epic poem, the *Roman de la rose*, contains several references to feasting and to wine, almost always accompanied by some sort of musical entertainment, but the music itself has not survived, as is so often the case.

of the play is a dramatized '*bergerie*', in which a group of rustic characters prepare meals and picnics consisting of capons, meat, cheese, bread, pies, apples, roasted peas, bacon, watercress, peeled garlic, curdled milk and wine; they play games and musical instruments, such as bagpipes, utter vulgarities, enter into verbal disputes, make love and conclude their celebrations by dancing a *farandole*.⁸ It is thought that this dance formed part of the entertainment at the marriage of Robin and Marion, and there is even an entry in an early manuscript of the work which calls it '*Mariage de Robin e de Marion*'. The play is filled with elements of the carnival (as in the election of a shepherd as king, as well as in the dances and meals); the numerous references to food and drink, so often connoting parts of the body, make for ribaldry and obscenity typical of peasant farce. One example is the erotic word play on the bodice where Marion and her shepherdess friend store their two loaves of bread. Worse yet is one of the character's ideas of a '*bonne chanson*', when he proceeds to sing a song that is actually a scatalogical line from a mock epic poem.⁹ At least one of the songs in the play contains items of food in its poetry. The references to pies, capons with nice fat rumps, and eating mouth to mouth need no further comment.¹⁰ The singing and dancing are

continued

See also Kate van Orden, 'Sexual Discourse in the Parisian Chanson: A Libidinous Aviary', *Journal of the American Musicological Society* (1995), pp. 1–41. In her discussion of birds as central carnivalesque subjects, she refers to a chanson that associates the bird with male genitalia and states in a footnote that this chanson 'plays off the "Robin and Marion" story familiar to musicologists from Adam de la Halles's *Jeu de Robin e Marion* in which the sexual subtext turns around a knight-errant's falcon'. What she neglects to mention are all of those subtexts where food and food substances are substitutes for parts of the body, such as genitalia.

⁸ The *farandole* may have its origins in ancient times in Provence as a dance in triple time accompanied by pipe and tabor that involved a chain of men and women who follow a leader in a variety of winding patterns passing under the raised arms of couples from the chain. Schwam-Baird (*Robin et Marion*, p. 68) includes a description from Ernest Langlois' 1895 article 'Interpolations du *Jeu de Robin et Marion*'. In it he explained how the dance was done: 'Robin tient de la main droite le gant que Marion vient de lui donner; de sa main gauche il prend la main gauche de Marion, qui a sa main droite dans celle de Gautier. Après Gautier vient Perrette, puis Baudon. La farandole fait deux ou trois fois le tour de la scène, pendant que Huart et les corneurs jouent; puis elle disparaît, ainsi que les musiciens'.

⁹ Schwam-Baird, *Robin et Marion*, line 728 and p. xix.

¹⁰ 'I still have one of those pies/ with nothing about it/ That we shall eat, my Marion/ mouth to mouth, both me and you; Wait for me here, my Marion/ here I will come to talk to you/ Marion, do you want more from me?' And after Marion's affirmative response, Robin continues: 'Then, I tell you – That I have one of those capons/ With a nice fat rump/ that we shall eat, my Marion/ mouth to mouth, both me and you; Wait for me here, my Marion/ here I will come to talk to you.' Schwann-Baird, *Robin et Marion*, lines 657–70.

interspersed throughout, often accompanied by the instrument of the peasant, a bagpipe; the opening song ‘Robins m'aime’ ('Robin loves me') became so popular it later found its way into the motet repertory hidden between serious and sometimes even sacred texts.

The so-called genre of motet-enté combines aspects of proper courtly behaviour, or even references to something liturgical, with the newly emerging secular, and perhaps even slightly off-colour, poetry and accompanying popular tunes. An anonymous thirteenth-century motet from the Montpellier codex, ‘On parole – À Paris – Frèse nouvele’, contains a top voice that speaks of the good life complete with wine and capons, a middle voice that mentions finding, in Paris, good bread and good clear wine, meat and fish, and a tenor that chants a Parisian street cry ‘Fresh strawberries, wild blackberries’.¹¹ Street cries form a large untapped source of information on food and on market life in the medieval and early modern periods. Many can be found embedded in the polyphonic literature, particularly in the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century motet, as well as in music associated with the French theatre, and in the German, French and Italian popular repertoires. Some of these works are descriptive of market scenes, while others include melodic snippets of the calls that vendors and hawkers would make while advertising and selling their wares, everything from berries and honey cakes to butter, oil, mustard, vinegar, buttermilk, lard, fish, sweetmeats, spoons, ladles and services such as chimney-sweeping, singing, playing instruments and reciting poetry. Some of these cries have ribald texts, others became the basis for *basse danses*, and still others found their way into the artistic repertoires of the French chanson (such as those by Janequin and Servin in the sixteenth century) and into the Italian caccia, carnival song and frottola.¹²

¹¹ Archibald T. Davison and Willi Apel, *Historical Anthology of Music* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1964), no. 33b. The text reads: ‘*On parole*: They speak of beating and winnowing and of digging and of ploughing, but these pastimes displease me. For there is no life as good as being at ease, with good clear wines and capons, and to be with good companions, gay and joyous, singing, cheating and amorous; and to have, when one needs them, fair ladies to solace us as we wish; and all this one finds at Paris. *À Paris*: At Paris, morning and night, one finds good bread and good clear wine, good meat and good fish, companions of all sorts, clever wit, great joy, ladies of honour; and also there are, at good occasion, means to live for poverty-stricken men. *Frèse*: Fresh strawberries, wild blackberries!’

¹² See Susan F. Weiss, ‘Quodlibets and Centone: A Sharing of Folk Repertoires’, forthcoming in *Proceedings: Austria 996–1996, Music in a Changing Society*, International Conference, Ottawa, Canada, 6 January 1996. For more on street cries see Maria Maniates’ article in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (London, 1980), xviii, pp. 265–66, as well as Howard M. Brown, *Music in the French Secular Theatre* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1963).

Lucretius, in the second chapter of his *De rerum natura*, describes a feast in honour of the goddess Cybele: 'the taut drums throb to the beat of the palms, the hollow cymbals crash around them, the trumpets sound their harsh threat and the Phrygian rhythm of the *tibia* stirs the soul'.¹³ Feasting in the middle ages and in the Renaissance was often accompanied by a wide variety of musical instruments but, in almost every case, the musicians were clearly the hired help. In a detail from a thirteenth-century French Bible, the instrumentalists, playing fiddle, harp, symphonia (a medieval stringed keyboard instrument) and psaltery, the last appearing to conduct with his hand, appear below the toasting banqueters. Occasionally the musician is a young boy placed in an aristocratic household to perform small services, such as learning to play a musical instrument, stablecraft, swordplay or other skills. A young boy is pictured on the bottom right of a thirteenth-century illumination of the coronation and celebratory banquet for Henry, son of Henry II of England; he has secured a harp on his lap by wrapping the base in its bag.¹⁴ A fourteenth-century satire with music, the *Roman de Fauvel*, was written jointly by several members of the French court and depicted the evils that flourished there, including corruption in the church and the sinfulness of knights who had taken an oath to do only good deeds.¹⁵ It was

¹³ This passage serves to validate the notion that in Ancient Greece and Rome, while the kithara and lyre, associated with the god Apollo, often accompanied the voice, winds, such as the aulos and percussion instruments were associated more with dancing and pagan rites, such as those practised by Dionysus and the Bacchantes. Mary Remnant, *Musical Instruments: An Illustrated History from Antiquity to the Present* (London, 1989), p. 191.

¹⁴ Christopher Page, *The Owl and the Nightingale: Musical Life and Ideas in France, 1100–1300* (London, 1989), pp. 94–97; the musical instrument might be a fiddle or harp.

¹⁵ See Jeanneret, *A Feast of Words*, p. 132, on the Latin etymology for satire: a dish of mixed ingredients, a salad, a *macedoine*, a *salmagundi* or a *pot-pourri*: a composite genre derived from other forms (see chapter 6 on satire and its cooking). An author may think of himself as a cook, as for example, Montaigne: 'all this medley [fricassée] which I am scribbling here' (*Essays*, iii, 13, p. 361). 'The analogy gives the work of writing a festive and often burlesque character; the text is ordered like a menu, the elements of style are measured out as in a sauce, and the tale contains a variety of ingredients, like a stew.' Jeanneret, *A Feast of Words*, p. 132; see also p. 214, on Folengo and the *ars macaronica*; food is the focus and Folengo provides the model for Rabelais. Substituting pasta for ambrosia takes the text to more vulgar registers. 'Folengo replaces the *topoi* of epic grandeur with the buffoonery of Baldus and his companion, in the realistic . . . setting of Mantuan peasantry.' He alludes to writings of his contemporaries, Pulci (his *Morgante*) and Ariosto (*Orlando furioso*), among others. 'He prefers a comic fairy tale, which dispels fear, to the serious and threatening representation of Hell in his reference to Dante'. Jeanneret, *A Feast of Words*, pp. 220–21.

written in the tradition of animal fables, popular in French literature of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.¹⁶ Fauvel, the central character, is a donkey whose name is an acrostic: Flattery, Avarice, Untruthfulness, Variability, Envy, Laziness. While the donkey and his guests partake of the wedding feast, the musicians, in this case revellers banging on pots and pans, creating a kind of charivari, serenade first the banquetters and later on Fauvel as he makes his way to the marriage bed. The music is far more sophisticated than the rather crude instruments might suggest. The most current forms and styles of the so-called *Ars Nova* are represented in a complex polytextual isorhythmic motet ‘*Garrit gallus/ In nova fert/ Neuma*’ by the composer Phillippe de Vitry (whose treatise gave this period of fourteenth-century music its name, and many of whose works are included in the Fauvel MS). The tenor is a melody borrowed from liturgical chant. The *duplum* ‘*In nova fert*’ borrows passages from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* and sings of a fox (most likely the chief councillor of the French king) whose tail the lion (undoubtedly Philip IV the Fair), deprived of sight, obeys, while complaining that this fox does not abstain from meats at the wedding feast.¹⁷

Visual representations of feasts – often connected to nuptials – with musical entertainment share a number of features in common. A recent reconstruction of the Feast of the Pheasant as it was supposedly celebrated by Philip the Good and his knights in Lille in 1454 includes the performance with musical *entremets*, based largely on the memoirs of one of the event’s organizers, Olivier de la Marche.¹⁸ In his attempt to mount another Crusade against the Turks, Philip invited knights to a banquet characterized by an enormous amount of pomp and ceremony in which music played no small part. In the hall were three tables of varying sizes where the entertainment was staged, as in a three-ring circus. On the medium-sized one was a model of a church with singers inside who sang and played on an organ when their turn came. On the large table was a huge pie or pastry in which there were twenty-eight musicians playing on diverse

¹⁶ Jeremy Yudkin, *Music in Medieval Europe* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1989), p. 460.

¹⁷ This motet has been transcribed in a number of modern editions, such as *Norton Anthology of Western Music*, 2nd edn, ed. Claude Palisca (New York, 1988), no. 21.

¹⁸ Christopher Hogwood, *Music at Court* (London, 1977), pp. 20ff. See also Reinhard Strohm, *Music in Late Medieval Bruges* (Oxford, 1985), p. 98. This banquet is an example of the blurring of sacred and secular, or what Strohm calls a ‘conflation’ of elements that he says was typical at these feasts. We will return to this concept of ‘sacred’ feast at the end of this essay, very briefly.

instruments.¹⁹ Instrumentalists included a bagpiper and two blind musicians playing hurdy-gurdies. Depictions of this feast and other contemporaneous ones contain some familiar items: the sparsely set tables, requisite dog (or horse), servers, pourers and musicians – three shawm players – isolated, perhaps as much for noise as for low social status. In almost every instance the instrumentalists are set apart from the banqueters. Music was appreciated by the nobility, spectacles were applauded, but there was rarely involvement. The instrumentalists – varying in numbers and in the type of instrument – were placed either above the spectators and dancers or off to the side or below, in outdoor celebrations, in semi-erotic or mythological scenes. From the many images, it appears as if dancers, animals, food servers and most certainly the spectators had higher status at banquets than instrumentalists loud or soft.²⁰

One of the chansons performed at the Feast of the Pheasant at Lille was sung by a child of twelve, accompanied by the huge and beautiful stag upon which he was mounted. According to de la Marche, the stag sang the tenor of 'Je ne vis oncque', thought to have been composed by Gilles de Binchois, a composer of great renown. This is the only composition mentioned by name in de la Marche's memoirs. Perhaps Binchois and the even better-known Guillaume Dufay were responsible for a number of pieces in the feast, as both were said to have been in attendance.

Dufay was the composer of a courtly *rondeau* (dated 1426) that contained references to food and wine within the poetry itself.²¹ The text describes

¹⁹ Perhaps the origin of 'Four and twenty blackbirds baked in a pie'.

²⁰ In the mural painting of the Renaissance wedding feast of Sir Henry Unton, the musicians – playing the flute, treble lute, pandora, cittern, bass viol and treble viol – are seated downstairs while the masquers are making their way up the stairs to entertain the wedding party (see Hogwood, *Music at Court*).

²¹ Adieu ces bons vins de Lannoys,	Farewell, these good wines of Lannoy.
Adieu dames, adieu borgois,	Farewell, ladies, farewell, townsfolk.
Adieu celle que tant amoye,	Farewell to her whom I loved so well.
Adieu toute playsante joye	Farewell all pleasurable joy.
Adieu tous compaignons galois.	Farewell all my Welsh companions.
Je me'en vois tout arquant des nois,	I find myself searching for nuts,
Car je ne truis feves ne pois,	Because I cannot find beans or peas,
Dont bien souvent [...] ier mennoye.	Which very often makes me annoyed.
Adieu ces bons vins de Lannoys.	Farewell, these good wines of Lannoy
Adieu dames, adieu borgois,	Farewell ladies, farewell townsfolk
Adieu celle que tant amoye	Farewell to her whom I loved so well.
De moy seres, par plusiers fois	By me you will be often
Regretes par dedans les bois,	Missed, deep in the woods

Dufay's longings for more than just the good wines of Lannoy and also refers to symbolic nuts, beans and peas. In keeping with the spirit of the chivalric code as recaptured during the earlier reign of Philip the Good's predecessor Philip the Bold, the object was to protect and honour the female sex, so there is no explicit reference to sexuality such as that found in Adam de la Halle's *Jeu de Robin e Marion*. The more the musicians and poets of the late middle ages attempted to reinstate an archaic code of chivalry, the more they seemed to search for artificial devices, anagrams, riddles and metaphors. This is evident to some degree in Dufay's *rondeau*, but was to be seen to a far greater extent in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries.

It seems as though the songs written during the middle ages and Renaissance that contain references to food, to drinking and to eating fall into at least three categories: those from the courtly repertoire that contain general reference – although possibly with hidden meaning – to food and drink; those from the newly emerging popular genres where specific foods are mentioned in a less concealed manner; and a hybrid form that borrows and sprinkles in a bit of rustic flavour here and there.²² Yet another category existed for love potions, probably more a branch of magic and alchemy.²³ In the courtly category there existed an anonymous *rondeau*, 'A party that no one forgets', dating from the 1460s or 1470s, which actually describes the party, its location, Cambrai, its illustrious guests, the composers Robert Morton and Hayne (van Ghizeghem) and the fact that fine dishes were served in fine sets, and that duets and quartets were performed by 'low' instruments so loud one could hear

continued

Ou il n'y a sentier ne voye:
Puis ne scaray que faire doye,
Se je ne crie a haute vois.
Adieu ces bons vins de Lannoy, etc.

Where there is no path or way:
Then I shall not know what I should do
Unless I shout in a loud voice.
Farewell, these good wines of Lannoy, etc.

The musical and gastronomic influence of the Burgundian court was not limited to that geographic region. The Emperor Maximilian, who knew the ways of the court from his marriage to Mary of Burgundy, brought musicians from the Low Countries to Innsbruck. We also know from his letters that he sent one of his cooks to Burgundy to learn to make patés in the Low Country manner. Hogwood, *Music at Court*, p. 25.

²² There is a line about hunger in Oswald Wolkenstein's programmatic fourteenth-century song *Der May* and one has to question whether this is a case of hunger from lack of eating alone, or for something of a more carnal nature. 'Der hunger macht lunger, Mir den Magen schier', *Historical Anthology of Music*, no. 60.

²³ Potions figure in the recipe for love in the chanson by the Franco-Flemish composer Alexander Agricola, *C'est trop sus amours entrepis* ('To undertake the alchemy of love'): Howard M. Brown, *A Florentine Chansonnier* (Chicago, 1983), no. 63; no. 100 is another example.

them in Metz.²⁴ By stating that low or ‘*bas*’ instruments are ‘so loud’ the poet was betraying his ignorance. ‘*Bas*’ as opposed to ‘*haut*’ actually referred to softer sounding instruments, such as lutes and harps.²⁵ Or, as has been suggested, was the poet making another pun (the *rondeau* is filled with them) on the ‘*bas*’ social status of those ‘*haut*’ musicians?²⁶

Another example comes from the Spanish repertory, but one that fell under the influence of the northern traditions. Luys de Narváez may have been in the service of Charles V and was, in the 1540s, a music teacher to the children in the chapel of Prince Philip. His romance or ballad for voice and vihuela accompaniment, ‘Ya se siente el rey Ramiro’, describes a story told at a meal shared by King Ramiro and three of his commanders. The text includes the following account: ‘We rode for seven days, and never ate bread, nor did the horses eat barley, which weighed on us much more . . .’ In this case the characters are sharing one meal, while discussing the foods they did not eat en route to battle.²⁷

After a period of Franco-Flemish hegemony in the first half of the century, the Italians, around the third quarter of the Quattrocento, were beginning to establish themselves as composers of polyphony. One genre in which they excelled, particularly in Florence, was the carnival song. The carnivals were held before Lent and between 1 May and 24 June, and a regular part of the festivities was merrymaking and singing in the streets, with grand torchlight processions featuring magnificent pageant

²⁴ Howard M. Brown, *A Florentine Chansonnier*, no. 72, (rondeau titled ‘Se je fay’ or ‘La plus grant chiere de jamais’); cf. p. 116. The distance from Cambrai to Metz (Mezier) is about seventy-five kilometres.

²⁵ John Lydgate (c. 1373–c. 1450), in *Reson and Sensuallyte*, wrote of ‘Instrumentys high and lowe / wel mo than I koude knowe’ and of ‘lowde’ instruments being used for dancing. French authors cited the words *haut* and *bas* referring to volume, not pitch, the latter used on festive occasions and in smaller ensembles for dancing. K.M. Stolba, *The Development of Western Music* (2nd edn, Madison, Wisconsin, 1994), p. 133.

²⁶ Another example from this period that contains reference to food in the text is a four-voice chanson by Loiset Compère, one of the compositions included in Petrucci’s first printed source of polyphonic music, the *Odhecaton* (Venice, 1501). The melody of ‘Un franc archier’ is taken from a popular song and the text is a description of the ‘free archers’ or French soldiers who were often mocked for their cowardice. In one version the soldier is given onion soup to cool his heat, and in another he cooks himself a tasty *dejeuner* of well-seasoned tripe and onion soup, and a supper of fancy *fricasee*. The image of the yokel soldier crossing the mountains into Italy is heightened by the refrain which is made up of nonsense syllables ‘la la too too, la la tweet tweet’ in one version and ‘Vidagon vignette sur vignon’ in another. Brown, *A Florentine Chansonnier*, no. 168.

²⁷ *Spanish Romances of the Sixteenth Century*, ed. Thomas Binkley and Margit Frenk (Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana, 1995), pp. 116ff.

carts and costumed masqueraders. Many *canti carnascialeschi* were based on popular tunes of the day. In fact, the tunes were so popular that, following Lorenzo de' Medici's death, a number of them became the melodies for the *lauda* of the followers of Savonarola.²⁸ Several deal quite directly with the matter of food. One that comes to mind is the 'Canto de' cardoni' whose poet refers to the growers of artichokes, and how one plants, cultivates and properly eats the vegetable. The 'moral' states that 'an artichoke eaten without salt is as unexciting as a woman who goes to the carnival with her own husband'.²⁹

It is the metaphoric musical salad, or some of the culinary terms used to describe this form, such as the *ensalada*, *fricassée*, *rotibouilli*, or the *mesticanza*, *centone* and other forms of the generic quodlibet, that provides material regarding the foods eaten in more rustic settings.³⁰ Heinrich Isaac's 'Donna di dentro / Dammene un pocho / Fortuna d'un gran tempo', like the polytextual motet described earlier, has a different text in each voice. Melodies and texts from some of the most popular tunes of the late fifteenth century are cobbled together, such as 'Fortuna d'un

²⁸ *Florentine Festival Music, 1480–1520*, ed. J.J. Gallucci Jr (Madison, Wisconsin, 1981), pp. vii–xi; cf. Patrick Macey, 'The Lauda and the Cult of Savonarola' in *Renaissance Quarterly*, 45, (1992), pp. 439–83.

²⁹ The poet is Lorenzo de Filippo Strozzi; Gallucci, *Florentine Festival Music*, no. 6. 'Canto di donne maestre di far cacio' is a song that describes how women become expert at making cheese, with a step-by-step explanation of the manufacturing process. The poet, Jacopo da Bientina, lists other attributes required to achieve a good product, such as patience, great care, good eyesight and cleanliness. *Ibid.* no. 21.

³⁰ J. Tinctoris, *Proportionale musices*, 1472, uses a quodlibet for illustration; cf. Reese, *Music in the Renaissance* (New York, 1959), p. 146; see above, n. 15. These pot-pourri were also used by Glareanus and Zarlino, but it was Praetorius, in his *Syntagma musicum* (1618), who provided the first systematic definition: a mixture of diverse elements quoted from sacred and secular compositions. He presented three categories: 1. Each voice is an independent *cantus prius factus*; 2. Each voice is a patchwork of quoted fragments; 3. One voice is a patchwork of quotations whose text is shared by other voices (cf. Maniates et al., *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, xv, pp. 515ff). Generally the quodlibet served no higher purpose than that of humour or technical virtuosity, unlike serious works that use preexisting material as a structural or symbolic device. Praetorius refers to *messanza* (or *mistchanza*) as the Italian form of the quodlibet, but, in fact, there are several other terms that can apply to the Italian combinative compositions, such as *centone* and *incatenature*. Sometimes popular tunes are found quoted in the refrains of *frottole*. Howard M. Brown, in *Music in the French Secular Theatre*, p. 85, cites Clement Janequin's 'Les cris de Paris' and Jean Servin's 'La fricassée des cris de Paris' as two chansons composed almost entirely of advertising slogans that enable one to reconstruct the melodic formulas for a number of street cries that constitute a special category of stage music intended to imitate everyday life. See also above, pp. 29, 31–32, 51, 163, on street cries; also see above, p. 164 n. 15, for reference from Jeanneret on Folengo.

gran tempo' and 'Dammene un pocho di quella mazacrocha', both mentioned as dances by Cesare Nappi in his rustic eclogue of 1508.³¹ The word *mazzacrocha* may have several meanings, from a small bunch of crocuses, to a kind of unleavened bread (matzoh), to a long pastry or cake in the shape of a stick with a knob at one end, to a shepherd's staff, to a dance popular in the sixteenth century, or finally to an unprintable obscenity.³²

Isaac, an international composer from the Low Countries, also worked in a number of northern Italian cities, as well as at Innsbruck for the Emperor Maximilian. He arrived in Florence in about 1484, where he worked as organist at several churches and served Lorenzo, teaching the Medici children as well as composing music for the carnivals. Although none of Isaac's *canti carnascialeschi* survive intact, the quodlibet 'Donna di dentro' belongs to the same genre. The popular tune 'Famene un pocho de quella mazachroca' is also found in the *riprese* of 'A che son hormai' by the Bolognese composer Alessandro Demophon. Demophon must have liked the idea of using slightly off-colour tunes as refrains in his music; he did the same thing with the piece about unlacing rib-

³¹ Cesare Nappi, 'Egloga villereccia'.

³² Donna, di dentro della tua casa

Son rose, gigli et fiori

Dammene un pocho di maza chroca;

Ne sente ghusto alcuno

Fortuna d'un gran tempo

O gloriosa donna mis bella,

Dammene un poch' di quella maza chroca

Dammene un poch' di quella maza chroca

Et mene dar troppo.

Lady, within your house

There are roses, lilies and flowers

Give me a small bunch of crocuses;

For a long time

Fortune has had the scent of it

O my proud, fine lady,

Give me a small bunch of crocuses

Give me a small bunch of crocuses

And give me much.

Brown, *A Florentine Chansonnier*, no. 150, p. 130, mentions that Pannella (the author of the most complete study of this text) favours the bawdy definition, coming from the Arabic, by way of the Spanish *mazorca* or Portuguese *macaroca*, meaning the breadstick. Torrefranca, *Il segreto del Quattrocento* (Milan, 1939), p. 140n., favours the definition as *focaccia*. Cattin, Prizer, and Jeppesen (*La Frottola*, iii, p. 25) believe that the word comes from the Yiddish '*matzechuchen*'. Several other definitions have been put forward, including one by Sir John Florio in 1611 who defined '*maza*' as a kind of 'meate, grawell, or hastie pudding that countrie people were wont to eate, made of milke, water, oyle, meale and salt' (*Queen Anna's New World of Words*, London, 1611; rpt 1968, p. 304). In his article, 'Games of Venus: Secular Vocal Music in the Late Quattrocento and Early Cinquecento', in *Journal of Musicology*, 9 (1991), pp. 3–56, William Prizer mentions that Padua was a city well-disposed to the poetry and music that accompanied this movement from 'palace to barnyard'. *Villotte* are popular polyphonic pieces that contain dialogue, dialect, characters from the lower echelons (such as the womanizer from Bergamo), and the requisite corpus of popular tunes. Although they are generally from the Veneto, a number of them appear in the repertoires of Lombardy, Tuscany and Rome.

bons and admiring violets mentioned earlier in connection with the Bolognese eclogue. Both compositions were written in the courtly genre known as the *frottola*. William Prizer, in his article 'Games of Venus: Secular Vocal Music in the Late Quattrocento and Early Cinquecento', believes that the nonsense insertion of the popular song into the essentially courtly poem functions as a parody of the courtly repertory, since the popular tune is textually dissonant with the courtly stanza that precedes it.³³ In this and many other cases, it is clear that the urbanization or rusticization of the courtly tradition was at work.³⁴

³³ See above, n. 32. Another example, 'Vilana, che sa' tu far?', that contains references to herbs, flour and baking, begins as a dialogue between a peasant girl and her suitor who asks her a leading question, but proceeds with nonsense syllables and disconnected fragments including the litany 'Exaudi nos' and a quotation from the text of the Mass (Howard M. Brown, *A Florentine Chansonnier*, no. 180, p. 131). Elements of the popular are found in pieces unique to a manuscript of c. 1500 that clearly belongs to the court of the Gonzaga at Mantua. These include two settings of the popular tune 'Tente allora', a work by Tromboncino that includes the nonsensical *ripresa*, one by Cara that quotes the dance tune 'Rostiboli gioioso' in its cantus (known in France as the 'Roti bouilli' or the roasts and boiled meats), and some works that were most probably for the Mantuan court theatre. *Guglielmo Ebreo of Pesaro*, ed. Barbara Sparti (Oxford, 1993), p. 147. Prizer, 'Paris 676 and Musical Life at Mantua Around 1500', typescript of unpublished paper (1988), includes a piece, 'Anguilles, anguilles, anguillions' and 'Io som maistro Barileto' that employs a popular street cry about the procession of the eels (in fractured Italian and French), and another about the rantings of a drunken court cook whose name translates as 'little keg'. Prizer believes that the piece about the drunken cook was probably included in an *intermedio* of a comedy performed at court. A bit later one finds true *villotte*, or pieces that rely exclusively on popular tunes, use dialect, dialogue and sometimes a dancelike refrain and a series of nonsense syllables. One such example is Marchetto Cara's 'Le son tre fantinelle', which tells of three little maids who are to be married, and how they would make garlands of flowers to wear at their important feasts, with the dancelike nonsense refrain 'Tandan dan dan daritondella Tan daridundella'. See W. Prizer, ed., *Libro primo del la Croce: Rome, Pasoti and Dorico, 1526, canzoni, frottole and capitoli* (Madison, Wisconsin, 1978), no. 14.

³⁴ Musical parody has its literary counterpart in the *centone* being written during this period. My thanks to Deanna Shemek for sharing with me a draft of chapter 4 from her new book, *Ladies Errant: Wayward Women and Social Order in Early Modern Italy* (Durham, North Carolina, and London, 1998). It analyses poetry of Laura Terracina and its relationship to Ariosto's epic, as a miniature version devoid of plot. She resorts to the tradition of the Italian *centone*, stemming from the *cento* of Antiquity, which as first adopted by Greek and Latin Homerists, rearranges the verses of one author into new, occasionally subversive 'patchwork poetics'. There are examples in Christine de Pisan's writings, as well as in the earlier works of a feminist poet of the fourth century, Petronia Proba, the latter a rearranger of Virgil and the former of Boccaccio. Terracina may have been inspired by Petrarch's *Rime sparse*, number 70, which borrows lines from Dante and Cavalcanti, among others (Shemek, pp. 296ff).

The thirteenth-century play about Robin and Marion made use of the food, music and musical instruments of a peasant tradition; the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century motets occasionally revealed some combination of courtly and peasant fare. The late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries saw an attempt at revival of the chivalric code, as seen in the works of the Mannerist composers at the court of Philip the Bold and in the chansons of the composers associated with the courts of Philip the Good and Charles the Bold. This was followed by a renewed effort to wed the courtly and popular traditions in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. Prizer describes a 'movement away from the Petrarchan *amour courtois* to the more popular notions of love that treat both the lover and the woman as solid flesh and blood'.³⁵ The replacement of the courtier by the villager, as in the Nappi eclogue described earlier, or in an entire repertory of theatrical works stemming from Siena and Padua, allow, according to Prizer, 'the courtier to escape from the confinements of the *amour courtois*'.³⁶ One very clear example is found in the diary of the Estensi family steward Cristoforo Messibugo, who detailed not only the entertainments between each of the many courses, but also gave recipes for the mouth-watering Epicurean delights that were served to the aristocrats in attendance at these early sixteenth-century banquets.³⁷ During one of the courses the guests were entertained

³⁵ Prizer, 'Games of Venus', p. 17.

³⁶ Ibid, p. 17.

³⁷ Howard M. Brown, 'A Cook's Tour of Ferrara in 1529', *Rivista italiana di musicologia*, 10 (1975), p. 217. Messibugo's cookbook was entitled *Banchetti, composizioni di vivande e apparecchio generale* (Ferrara, 1549). A modern edition has been made by Fernando Bandini (Venice, 1960). See also Angelo Solerti, 'Tavola e cucina nel secolo XVI', *Gazzetta letteraria*, 14 (1890), pp. 27–30; see also Prizer, 'Games of Venus', p. 35. Messibugo's description is of a banquet on Sunday, 24 January 1529, given by Ercole II d'Este for his father Ercole I d'Este, duke of Ferrara, his aunt, Isabella d'Este Gonzaga, marchioness of Mantua, his wife, Renée of France, his brother Ippolito II d'Este, archbishop of Milan, and a number of ambassadors and noble men and women. See also, W. Gundersheimer, ed., *Art and Life at the Court of Ercole I* (Geneva, 1972).

Following a performance of Ariosto's comedy *La cassaria*, the guests left the great hall so it could be prepared for the banquet. They repaired to rooms where they were entertained by instrumental music. When the trumpets sounded they returned to the great hall to wash their hands in perfumed water and eat the first course, a salad. This included endive, radicchio, small radishes (*ravenelli*) anchovies, tomatoes, truffles, eggs, mortadella, pastel-coloured pasta, croquette of wild boar, liver etc. During this first course a composition by Alfonso della Viola was sung by Madonna Dalida (Puti; the mistress of Ippolito II's uncle) and four others, as well as other vocal and instrumental music.

During the second course, which included capons, roasted and studded with orange, bread crumbs, quail, trout, eel, more pasta and of course the required wines from a

by a visitor from outside the Ferrarese ducal establishment, the famous Paduan playwright, actor and musician, Angelo Beolco, known by his stage name, Ruzzante.³⁸ While they were being served a variety of luscious pears, apples, ice creams and cheeses in the shapes of towers and castles, Ruzzante, with five male and two female companions, sang ‘cancioni e madrigali alla pavana’, and they went around the table debating in dialect about rustic things.³⁹ They may have been making a case for the benefits of peasant food over the delicacies of the nobility as Ruzzante himself did in his eclogue ‘*La Moschetta*’:

Still it would be better if you were to follow our example: eat good bread and good salted cheese, and drink good wine, a little dry, rather than eat so many delicacies and so many different kinds of foods.⁴⁰

Although the steward failed to give titles of music performed at the banquet, Ruzzante, who improvised much of his repertoire of dialect

continued

variety of vineyards, four people sang diverse madrigals. This continued for nine courses followed by a pasty from which the names of the guests would be drawn for party favours. Even for this ‘postlude’ the guests were serenaded by four flutes. Then, as if all this were not enough, trumpets sounded the signal to the guests to leave the great hall once more, so that this time it could be prepared for the ball. At 8.30 pm the shawms welcomed the guests to dance and all – except for the duke, duchess and marchioness, who retired to their rooms – partied, being fed one last time (a ‘light’ supper) before going home at dawn.

Most of the nine courses were provided with musical entertainment supplied by the court composer Alfonso della Viola, and the duke’s singers and instrumentalists, some of whose names are mentioned. The wide variety of instruments included lutes, viols, flutes, trombones, dolzaina, crumhorn *senza bussola* (without cap), recorders, an organ with various stops, a mute cornett, a lira, a quilled keyboard instrument, a harpsichord and shawms.

³⁸ Brown, ‘A Cook’s Tour’, p. 224.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 240; Prizer, ‘Games of Venus’, p. 35, suggests that the works sung by this group were most likely *villotte*. Brown, ‘A Cook’s Tour’, p. 224, considers this shift away from the more courtly entertainment akin to going from the sublime to the ridiculous. During the seventh course, which included oysters, oranges, meringues and whipped cream, the guests were entertained by jesters (*‘buffoni’*) ‘alla veneziana e alla bergamasca’, and rustics (*‘contadini’*) ‘alla pavana’ who went around the table clowning. Ruzzante had contact with peasants in his early life, exposing him to their cuisine, clothing, music and dance. His family’s university associations gave him a certain amount of literary sophistication. Ruzzante’s early work confirms his familiarity with the early major Italian writers, Dante and Petrarch, as well as with the contemporary Poliziano and Sannazaro. His patron Alvise Cornaro, a rich Venetian aristocrat living in Padua who was denied noble status in the Republic, built a theatre for Ruzzante. Cornaro, too, was an exponent of healthy living.

⁴⁰ Ruzzante, *La moschetta*, ed. A Franceschetti and K.R. Bartlett (Ottawa, 1993).

songs, mentioned titles within the texts of his own plays. Curiously, many of these songs, thought by some musicologists to be of Venetian origin, were also mentioned in that rustic Bolognese eclogue written years earlier by Cesare Nappi.⁴¹ The musical and culinary lines are blurred – courtly and popular, as well as secular and sacred – and the category of the sacred feast, accompanied by minstrels and mummers, often in veneration of the Blessed Virgin, in the interest of time, will have to be savoured in another essay.⁴²

⁴¹ Knud Jeppesen, 'Venetian Folk-Songs of the Renaissance', *Papers Read at the International Congress of Musicology* (New York, 1939), pp. 62–75.

⁴² The blurring of sacred and secular has already been alluded to in the discussion of the Feast of the Pheasant in Lille in 1454. 'The religious purpose or pretext of the feast was a crusade against the Turks, called for by several laments on the fall of Constantinople (May 1453) which seem to have been recited.' Strohm, *Music in Late Medieval Bruges* (Oxford, 1985), p. 98. Dufay's 'Lamentatio Sancte Matris Ecclesie Constantinopolitane' may have been performed at the feast. Guests included court chaplains, minstrels, church musicians from St Peter's in Lille, a veritable mix of secular and clerical. Guillaume Dufay, *Opera omnia*, ed. Heinrich Besseler, vi (Rome, 1964), pp. 19–21. Looking at an even earlier repertoire, that of Hildegard of Bingen's Sequences and Hymns (ed. Christopher Page, 1982), there are more examples of secular, erotic imagery – often making references to food and flowers, the harvest, animals – alongside divine grace and biblical devotion. Marriage both heavenly and earthly and music of the heavens and of the earth are among the subjects of Hildegard's poetry.

Pea pods in the borders of a page in a fifteenth-century Book of Hours are symbolic of the Virgin Mary, as mother of Jesus. The prayer on that page is concerned with the subject of wisdom. Mary is carrying the seed of eternal wisdom. The 'Owl and the Nightingale', a medieval allegorical tale, which is a debate in verse between a religious monkish owl and a free-spirited lively nightingale, is an expression of the difficulty in separating elements of sacred and secular. Christopher Page, *The Owl and the Nightingale: Musical Life and Ideas in France, 1100–1300* (London, 1989).

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